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CHRISTIANITY

AS

OLD AS THE CREATION:

OR THE

GOSPEL,

A

REPUBLICATION

OF THE

RELIGION OF NATURE.

BY MATTHEW TINDAL, L. L. D.

THE GENTILES, WHICH HAVE NOT THE LAW, DO BY NATURE THE THINGS CONTAINED IN THE LAW.—ROM. II. 14

GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS; BUT IN EVERY NATION, HE THAT FEARETH HIM, AND WORKETH RIGHTEOUSNESS, IS ACCEPTED WITH HIM —ACTS X. 34, 35.

The religion of the gospel, is the true original religion of reason and nature—And its precepts declarative of that original religion, which was as old as the creation ——DR. SHERLOCK.

God does nothing in the government of the world by mere will and arbitrariness —The will of God always determines itself to act according to the eternal reason of things —All rational creatures are obliged to govern themselves in all their actions by the same eternal rule of reason.

DR. S. CLARK.

NEWBURGH:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY DAVID DENNISTON.—M,DCC.XCVIII.

A

SHORT SKETCH

OF THE

AUTHOR, AND OF HIS WRITINGS.

EXTRACTED FROM THE BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY.

MATTHEW TINDAL, a moſt celebrated Engliſh writer, was the ſon of a clergyman of Beer-Ferres, in Devonſhire, and born about 1657. He became a commoner of Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1672, where he had the well known Dr. Hickes for his tutor, and thence removed to Exeter College. In 1676, he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and was afterwards elected fellow of All-Souls College. In 1679 he took Bachelor of Laws degree; and in July 1685 became a Doctor in that faculty. In the reign of James II. he delared himſelf a Roman Catholic, but afterwards renounced that religion,

He was greatly diſtinguiſhed in his time by two very extraordinary books which he publiſhed, one came out in 1706, under the title of "The Rights of the Chriſtian Church aſſerted, againſt the Romiſh and all other Prieſts who claim an independent power over it; with a

Preface concerning the Government of the Church of England, as by law eſtabliſhed." The other came out at London, 1730, under the title of "Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation: or, the Goſpel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature."

Beſides theſe two important works, he wrote a great number of ſmaller pieces or pamphlets in defence of Civil and Religious Liberty. He died at London, in Auguſt 1733, Fellow of All-Souls-College, and it appears that the faculties of his mind wore well; for, although he was about ſeventy-three when he publiſhed his "Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation," yet he left a ſecond volume of that work in manuſcript, by way of general reply to all his anſwers; the publication of which was prevented by Gibſon, biſhop of London. He was indiſputably a man of great reaſoning powers, and very ſufficient learning; and Churchmen might have wiſhed with reaſon, that he had been one of them.

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CHRISTIANITY,

AS OLD AS THE

CREATION, &c.

CHAPTER I.

That God, at all times, has given mankind ſufficient means of knowing what he requires of them; and what thoſe means are.

A. THIS early viſit, Sir, gives me hopes it will not be a ſhort one.

B. I come to talk with you on a ſubject which may, perhaps, keep me longer than you deſire.

A. Your unco mmon temper and candor, in debating even the moſt impor ant points, will always make your converſation agreeable, though ever ſo long: but pray what is to be the ſubject of our morning's diſcourſe?

B. I was yeſterday in company wi h a great many clergymen, it being our biſhop's p imary viſitation; where the complaint was general, of the coldn ſs and indifference, with which people received the ſpeculative points of chriſtianity, and all its holy rites; for which formerly they had ſhewn ſo great a zeal. This coldneſs they chiefly imputed to thoſe low churchmen, who lay the main ſtreſs on natural religion; and withal ſo magnify the doctrine of ſincerity, as in effect to place all religions on a level, where the profeſſors are alike ſincere.

The promoters of theſe notions, as well as theſe notions themſelves, were expoſed with warmth, how juſtly, I will not determine, until we have talked the matter over with our uſual freedom: for which reaſon I have made you this early viſit, and would be glad to know the ſentiments of ſo good a judge, on theſe two important points; viz. Sincerity and Natural Religion.

A. I thank you for this favour, and ſhall freely tell you, I ſo little agree with thoſe gentlemen in relation to ſincerity, that I think a ſincere examination into religious matters cannot be too much preſſed; this being the only way to diſcover true Chriſtianity. The Apoſtles thought themſelves obliged, in making proſelytes, to recommend an impartial ſearch; they both deſired and required men to judge for themſelves, to prove all things, &c. this they thought neceſſary, in order to renounce a religion, which the force of education had impreſſed on their minds, and embrace another directly contrary to the notions and prejudices they had imbibed. Nay, even thoſe very men, who moſt ridicule the doctrine of ſincerity, never fail on other occaſions to aſſert, that infidelity is owing to the want of a ſincere examination, and that whoſoever impartially conſiders Chriſtianity, muſt be convinced of its truth. And I might add, that could we ſuppoſe, a ſincere examination would not always produce this effect, yet muſt it always make men acceptable to God; ſince that is all God can require, all that it is in their power to do for the diſcovery of his will. Theſe, in ſhort, are my ſentiments as to this point; and as to the other, I think, too great a ſtreſs cannot be laid on natural religion; which, as I take it, differs not from revealed, but in the manner of its being communicated: the one being the internal, and the other the external revelation of the ſame unchangeable will of a being, who is alike at all times infinitely wiſe and good.

B. Surely, Sir, this muſt be extremely heterodox. Can you believe, that natural and revealed religion dif-

fer in nothing, but the manner of their being conveyed to us?

A. As heterodox as I may ſeem at preſent, I doubt not, but by aſking you a few queſtions, to let you ſee, I advance nothing in either of theſe points without reaſon; and in order to it, I deſire to be informed, whether God has not, from the beginning, given ſome rule, or law for their conduct? and whether the obſerving that, did not make them acceptable to him?

B. There can be no doubt, but the obſerving ſuch a law, muſt have anſwered the end for which it was given; and made men acceptable to God.

A. What more can any external revelation do, than render men acceptable to God? Again,

If God, then, from the beginning, gave men a religion; I aſk, was that religion imperfect or perfect?

B. Moſt perfect, without doubt; ſince no religion can come from a being of infinite wiſdom and perfection, but what is abſolutely perfect.

A. Can, therefore, a religion abſolutely perfect, admit of any alteration; or be capable of addition, or diminution; and not be as immutable as the author of it? Can revelation, I ſay, add any thing to a reſolution thus abſolutely perfect, univerſal, and immutable? Beſides, if God has given mankind a law, he muſt have given them likewiſe ſufficient means of knowing it; he would, otherwiſe, have defeated his own intent in giving it; ſince a law, as far as it is unintelligible, ceaſes to be a law. Shall we ſay, that God, who had the forming of human underſtanding, as well as his own laws, did not know how to adjuſt the one to the other?

If God at all times was willing all men ſhould come to the knowledge of his truth, could not his infinite wiſdom and power, at all times, find ſufficient means, for making mankind, capable of knowing, what his infinite goodneſs deſigned they ſhould know?

B. I grant you, that God was always willing that all men ſhould come to the knowledge of true religion; and we ſay, that the Chriſtian religion being the only

true, and abſolutely perfect religion, was what God, from the beginning, deſigned for all mankind.

A. If ſo, it follows, that the Chriſtian Religion has exiſted from the beginning, and that God, both then, and ever ſince, has continued to give all mankind ſufficient means to know it; and that it is their duty to know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe it; ſo that Chriſtianity, though the name is of a later date, muſt be as old, and as extenſive as human nature; and, as the law of our creation, muſt have been then implanted in us by God himſelf.

B. It would be too preſuming in us poor mortals, to pretend to account for the methods providence takes, in relation to the diſcovery of its will; and therefore, a perſon of leſs moderation might condemn your queſtions, as captious, preſumptuous, and founded in heterodoxy.

A. If God never intended mankind ſhould at any time be without religion, or have falſe religions; and there be but one true religion, which all have been ever bound to believe and profeſs; I cannot ſee any heterodoxy in affirming, that the means to effect this end of infinite wiſdom, muſt be as extenſive and univerſal as the end itſelf; or that all men, at all times, muſt have had ſufficent means to diſcover whatever God deſigned they ſhould know and practice. I do not mean by this that all ſhould have equal knowledge; but that all ſhould have what is ſufficient for the circumſtances they are in.

B. Since you have aſked me queſtions, let me, in my turn, demand of you, what are your ſentiments in this matter? Particularly, what are thoſe means, which, you ſuppoſe, God has, at all times, given to the whole race of mankind, to enable them to diſcover what he wills them to know, believe, profeſs and practiſe?

A. I aſk'd you theſe few queſtions at preſent, not to determine the point, but only to let you ſee you had no reaſon to be ſurpriſed at my ſaying, natural and revealed religion only differ as to the manner of their being com-

municated. I ſhall now readily anſwer your queſtions: and, as I think it my duty never to diſown my religious ſentiments, ſo I freely declare, that the uſe of thoſe faculties, by which men are diſtinguiſhed from brutes, is the only means they have to diſcern, whether there is a God; and whether he concerns himſelf with human affairs, or has given them any laws; and what thoſe laws are? and as men have no other faculties to judge with, ſo their uſing theſe after the beſt manner they can, muſt anſwer the end for which God gave them, and juſtify their conduct. For,

If God will judge mankind as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; the judgment muſt hold an exact proportion to the uſe they make of their reaſon. And it would be in vain to uſe it, if the uſe of it would not juſtify them before God; and men would be in a miſerable condition indeed, if whether they uſed it or not, they ſhould be alike criminal. And if God deſigned mankind ſhould at all times know, what he wills them to know, believe, profeſs and practiſe; and has given them no other means for this, but the uſe of reaſon; reaſon, human reaſon, muſt then be that means; for as God has made us rational creatures, and reaſon tells us, that it is his will that we act up to the dignity of our natures, ſo reaſon muſt tell us when we do ſo. What God requires us to know, believe, profeſs, and practiſe, muſt be in itſelf a reaſonable ſervice; but whether what is offered to us as ſuch, be really ſo, it is reaſon alone which muſt judge. As the eye is the ſole judge of what is viſible; the ear of what is audible; ſo reaſon, of what is reaſonable. If then reaſon was given to bring them to the knowledge of the will of God, that muſt be ſufficient to produce its intended effect, and can never bring men to take that for his will, which he deſigned they, by uſing their reaſon, ſhould avoid as contrary to it.

B. If men, having done all in their power, all that God requires them, to find out his will, ſhould fall into oppoſite ſentiments; muſt it not be the will of God that

it ſhould be ſo? Can God will ſuch a previous examination, and not will what he foreknows muſt be the neceſſary conſequence?

A. There is, I think, no way to avoid this objection, of God's willing contraries; but by ſuppoſing he requires nothing of men, but what is founded on the nature of things, and the immutable relations they bear to one another; and what, conſequently, they are, as far as concerns them, capable of knowing. But this objection is unanſwerable by thoſe who believe the will of God is not always thus founded; but may contain many merely poſitive things; ſince men may, after having taken all poſſible care to be in the right, have very oppoſite ſentiments, and be obliged, by the will of God, to hold and act contrarieties.

B. Though this ſubject is attended with the utmoſt difficulties, yet I find little or nothing ſaid to ſolve them I, for my part, know not how to deny men being acceptable to God, whatever their opinions may be, after having uſed all the means God has endowed them with for the diſcovery of his will; and yet I do not know how to admit it; for then, what religion ſoever men are of, if they have duly uſed ſuch means as God ordained for the diſcovery of his will; that, how oppoſite ſoever to Chriſtianity, muſt be the religion God deſigned them. And, on the other hand, ſhould I own, that the duly uſing thoſe means would have cauſed men to have been all of one religion; yet I cannot ſee how that could be the Chriſtian religion, except it has exiſted from the beginning; and all men, at all times, have had ſufficient means to diſcover it. For,

If God was always willing, that all men ſhould come to the knowledge of his truth; and there never was a time when God intended men ſhould have no religion, or ſuch an imperfect religion, as could not anſwer the end of its being inſtituted by an infinitely wiſe legiſlator; this ſeems, to my bewildered reaſon, to imply, that there was, from the beginning, but one true religion, which all men might know was their duty to em-

brace. And if this is true, I cannot well conceive how this character can confiſt with Chriſtianity; without allowing it, at the ſame time, to be as old as the creation. And yet, notwithſtanding all theſe ſeeming difficulties, I am confident the chriſtian religion is the only true religion. But ſince theſe difficulties are of your raiſing, I may, in juſtice, expect that you ſhould ſolve them.

A. This I muſt own is a difficult point; however, I ſhall tell you my ſentiments; which I, far from being a dogmatizer, am ready to give up, if you can frame any other hypotheſis, not liable to the ſame objections, or others equally ſtrong; though I may venture to ſay, that I take mine to to be the only one that can give any tolerable ſatisfaction to your preſent doubts. And therefore I ſhall attempt to ſhew you, that men, if they ſincerely endeavour to diſcover the will of God, will perceive, that there is a law of nature, or reaſon; which is ſo called, as being a law which is common, or natural, to all rational creatures; and that this law, like its author, is abſolutely perfect, eternal, and unchangeable; and that the deſign of the Goſpel was not to add to, or take from this law; but to free men from that load of ſuperſtition which had been mixed with it: So that true chriſtianity is not a religion of yeſterday, but what God, at the beginning, dictated, and ſtill continues to dictate to chriſtians, as well as others. If I am ſo happy as to ſucceed in this attempt, I hope not only fully to ſatisfy your doubts, but greatly to advance the honor of external revelation; by ſhewing the perfect agreement between that and internal revelation; and by ſo doing, deſtroy one of the moſt ſucceſsful attempts that has been made on religion, by ſetting the laws of God at variance.

But firſt I muſt premiſe, that in ſuppoſing an external revelation, I take it for granted that there is ſufficient evidence of the perſon's being ſent from God who publiſhed it; and I further own, that this divine perſon, by living up to what he taught, has ſet us a noble example; and that as he was rightly exalted for ſo doing, ſo

we, if we uſe our beſt endeavours, may expect a ſuitable reward. This, and every other thing of the ſame nature, I freely own, which is not inconſiſtent with the law of God's being the ſame, whether internally or externally revealed.

B. Your deſign I muſt own is highly commendable; but in order to ſucceed you are to prove two things. Firſt, that the ſupreme governor of mankind has given his ſubjects an univerſal law, which they, when they come to the uſe of their reaſon, are capable of knowing. Secondly, that the divine precepts muſt be the ſame, whether internally or externally revealed. If you prove theſe two points, you will entirely clear my doubts; but I almoſt deſpair of your doing it, ſince you ſeem to me to advance a new hypotheſis.

A. Hear the evidence, and then judge. But before I produce it, leſt the ſuppoſed novelty of the opinion may prejudice you, I ſhall put you in mind of what Archbiſhop Laud ſays upon a like occaſion: "That when errors are grown by age and continuance to ſtrength; they who ſpeak for the truth, though far older, are ordinarily challenged for bringing in new opinions; and there is no greater abſurdity ſtirring this day in Chriſtendom." Now,

By putting me to prove, that there is a law of nature, you, I ſuppoſe, have a mind to hear what I can ſay on this ſubject. Since none then that believe there is a God, who governs mankind, but believe he has given them a law for the governing their actions; this being implied in the very notion of governor and governed; and ſince the law by which he governs men, and his government muſt commence together, and extend alike to all his ſubjects; "Is it not, as biſhop Tillotſon obſerves, a great miſtake, to think that the obligation of moral duties does ſolely depend upon the revelation of God's will made to us in the holy ſcriptures? Is it not plain, that mankind was always under a law, even before God made an external or extraordinary revelation? Elſe, how could God judge the world? How ſhould

they, to whom the word of God never came, be acquitted or condemned at the laſt day? for where there is no law, there can neither be obedience nor tranſgreſſion."*

If then, it is abſurd to ſuppoſe, that men, though they lived ever ſo impiouſly and immorally, did nothing which God had forbid them; or if ever ſo piouſly and virtuouſly, nothing that God had commanded them; muſt there not always have been an univerſal law, ſo fully promulgated to mankind, that they could have no juſt plea from their ignorance, not to be tried by it. And could any thing leſs than its being founded on the nature of things, and the relation men ſtand in to God, and one another, viſible at all times to all, make it thus univerſally promulgated. But further to illuſtrate this matter; can it be imagined, that if God has been ſo good to all other animals, as to give them, not in one country only, but in all places whatſoever ſufficient means to act for their own preſervation; that he has had leſs kindneſs for the immortal ſouls of thoſe made after his own image, and has not given them, at one time as well as another, and at one place as well as another, ſufficient means to provide for their eternal happineſs? Or,

Can it be ſuppoſed, an infinitely good and gracious being, who gives men notice, by their ſenſes, what does good or hurt to their bodies; has had leſs regard for their immortal parts, and has not given them, at all times, by the light of their underſtanding, ſufficient means to diſcover what makes for the good of their ſouls; but has neceſſitated them, or any of them, to continue from age to age, in deſtructive ignorance or error? To preſs this matter further, let me aſk you, whether there is not a clear and diſtinct light, that enlightens all men; and which, the moment they attend to it, makes them perceive thoſe eternal truths, which are the foundation of all our knowledge? And is it not God himſelf who il-

* Preface to Wilkins of Natural Religion.

luminates them? What other reaſon can you aſſign, why infinite wiſdom ſhould act thus; but to give mankind ſtanding rules to diſtinguiſh truth from falſhood, eſpecially in matters of the higheſt conſequence to their eternal as well as temporal happineſs?

There has, no doubt, been a great number of traditional religions ucceeding one another; and as far as we know, there is no traditional religion, which has, except in name, continued the ſame for any long time; and though there are a great number of ſects, who go under the ſame common denomination, yet they are almoſt as much divided among themſelves, as if they owned different religions, and accordingly charge one another with erring fundamentally; yet all theſe agree in acknowledging a law of nature, and that they are indiſpenſably obliged to obey its dictates: So that this light of nature, like that of the ſun, is univerſal; and would, did not men ſhut the eyes of their underſtanding, or ſuffer others to blind them, ſoon diſperſe all thoſe miſts and fogs, which ariſe either from falſe traditions, or falſe interpretations of the true tradition.

CHAP. II.

That the religion of nature conſiſts in obſerving thoſe things, which our reaſon, by conſidering the nature of God and man, and the relation we ſtand in to him and one another, demonſtrates to be our duty; and that thoſe things are plain; and likewiſe what they are.

B. THAT we may the better konw whether the law, or religion of nature is univerſal, and the goſpel a republication of it, and not a new religion; I deſire you will give a definition of the religion of nature.

A. By natural religion, I underſtand the belief of the exiſtence of a God, and the ſenſe and practice of thoſe duties which reſult from the knowledge we, by

our reaſon, have of him and his perfections; and of the relation we ſtand in to him and our fellow-creatures; ſo that the religion of nature takes in every thing that is founded on the reaſon and nature of things. Hence Grotius defines the law of nature to be *dictatum rectæ rationis, indicans actui alicui, ex ejus convenientia aut diſconvenientia cum ipſa natura rationali, ineſſe, moralem turpitudinem, aut neceſſitatem moralem, ac conſequenter ab auctore naturæ, Deo talem actum aut vetari aut præcipi.*

I ſuppoſe you will allow, that it is evident by the light of nature, that there is a God; or in other words a Being abſolutely perfect, and infinitely happy in himſelf, who is the ſource of all other beings; and that what perfections ſoever the creatures have, they are wholly derived from him.

B. This, no doubt, has been demonſtrated over and over; and I muſt own, that I cannot be more certain of my own exiſtence, than of the exiſtence of ſuch a being.

A. Since then it is demonſtrable there is ſuch a being it is equally demonſtrable, that the creatures can neither add to, nor take from the happineſs of that being; and that he could have no motive in framing his creatures, or in giving laws to ſuch of them as he made capable of knowing his will, but their own good.

To imagine he created them firſt for his own ſake, and has ſince required things of them for that reaſon, is to ſuppoſe he was not perfectly happy in himſelf before the creation; and that the creatures, by either obſerving or not obſerving the rules preſcribed them, could add to, or take from his happineſs.

If then a being infinitely happy in himſelf, could not command his creatures any thing for his own good; nor an all-wiſe being things to no end or purpoſe; nor an all-good being any thing but for their good: It unavoidably follows, nothing can be a part of the divine law, but what tends to promote the common intereſt, and

mutual happineſs of his rational creatures; and every thing that does ſo, muſt be a part of it.

As God can require nothing of us, but what makes for our happineſs; ſo he, who cannot envy us any happineſs our nature is capable of, can forbid us thoſe things only, which tend to our hurt; and this we are as certain of, as that there is a God infinitely happy in himſelf, infinitely good and wiſe; and as God can deſign nothing by his laws but our good, ſo by being infinitely powerful, he can bring every thing to paſs which he deſigns for that end.

From the conſideration of theſe perfections, we cannot but have the higheſt veneration, nay, the greateſt adoration and love for this ſupreme being; who, that we may not fail to be as happy as poſſible for ſuch creatures to be, has made our acting for our preſent, to be the only means of obtaining our future happineſs; ſo that we cannot ſin againſt him, but by acting againſt ourſelves, that is, our reaſonable natures: theſe reflections, which occur to every one who in the leaſt conſiders, muſt give us a wonderful and ſurpriſing ſenſe of the divine goodneſs, fill us with admiration, tranſport and extacy; (of which we daily ſee among contemplative perſons, remarkable inſtances): and not only force us to expreſs a never-failing gratitude in raptures of the higheſt praiſe and thankſgiving, but make us ſtrive to imitate him in our extenſive love to our fellow-creatures, and thus copying the divine original, and taking God himſelf for our precedent, muſt conform us to his image, who is all perfection and all happineſs; and who muſt have an inexhauſtable love for all, who thus endeavor to imitate him. And here.

The difference between the ſupreme being, infinitely happy in himſelf, and the creatures who are not ſo, is, that all his actions, in relation to his creatures, flow from a pure diſintereſted love; whereas the ſpring of all the actions of the creatures is their own good: We love God, becauſe he firſt loved us; and conſequently, our love to him will be in proportion to our ſenſe

of his goodneſs to us. Nor can we in the leaſt vary from thoſe ſentiments, which the conſideration of the divine attributes implant in us, but we muſt in proportion take off from the goodneſs of God, and from thoſe motives we have to love him as we ought.

Our reaſon, which gives us a demonſtration of the divine perfections, affords us the ſame concerning the nature of thoſe duties God requires; not only with relation to himſelf, but to ourſelves, and one another: theſe we cannot but ſee, if we look into ourſelves, conſider our own natures, and the circumſtances God has placed us in with relation to our fellow-creatures, and what conduces to our mutual happineſs: our ſenſes, our reaſon, the experience of others as well as our own, cannot fail to give us ſufficient information.

With relation to ourſelves, we cannot but know how we are to act; if we conſider, that God has endowed man with ſuch a nature, as makes him neceſſarily deſire his own good; and therefore, may be ſure, that God, who has bellowed this nature on him, could not require any thing of him in prejudice of it; but on the contrary, that he ſhould do every thing which tends to promote the good of it. The health of the body, and the vigor of the mind, being highly conducive to our good, we muſt be ſenſible we offend our maker, if we indulge our ſenſes to the prejudice of theſe; and becauſe not only all irregular paſſions, all unfriendly affections carry their own torment with them, and endleſs inconveniences attend the exceſs of ſenſual delights; and all immoderate deſires (human nature being able to bear but a certain proportion) diſorder both mind and body; we cannot but know we ought to uſe great moderation with relation to our paſſions, or in other words, govern all our actions by reaſon; that and our true intereſt being inſeparable. And in a word, whoever ſo regulates his natural appetites, as will conduce moſt to the exerciſe of his reaſon, the health of his body, and the pleaſure of his ſenſes, taken and conſidered together (ſince herein his happineſs conſiſts) may be certain he

can never offend his maker; who, as he governs all things according to their natures, cannot but expect his rational creatures ſhould act according to their natures.

As to what God expects from man with relation to each other; every one muſt know his duty, who conſiders that the common parent of mankind has the whole ſpecies alike under his protection, and will equally puniſh him for injuring others as he would others for injuring him; and conſequently, that it is duty to deal with them as he expects they ſhould deal with him in the like circumſtances. How much this is his duty, every one muſt perceive, who conſiders himſelf as a weak creature, not able to ſubſiſt without the aſſiſtance of others, who have it in their power to retaliate the uſage he gives them: and that he may expect, if he breaks thoſe rules which are neceſſary for mens mutual happineſs, to be treated like a common enemy, not only by the perſons injured, but by all others; who, by the common ties of nature, are obliged to defend and aſſiſt each other. And not only a man's own particular intereſt, but that of his children, his family, and all that is dear to him, obliges him to promote the common happineſs, and to endeavour to convey the ſame to poſterity.

All *moraliſts* agree, that human nature is ſo conſtituted, that men cannot live without ſociety and mutual aſſiſtance; and that God has endowed them with reaſon, ſpeech, and other faculties, evidently fitted to enable them to aſſiſt each other in all the concerns of life; that, therefore, it is the will of God who gives them this nature, and endows them with thoſe faculties, that they ſhould employ them for their common benefit and mutual aſſiſtance. And the *philoſophers*, who ſaw that all ſociety would be diſſolved, and men ſoon become deſtitute even of the neceſſaries of life, and be a prey to one another, if each man was only to mind himſelf, and his own ſingle intereſt; and that every thing pointed out the neceſſity of mutual benevolence among mankind; did therefore rightly judge, that men were by their nature framed to be uſeful to one another: *ad tuendos conſervandoſque homines hominem natum eſſe*, ſays Cicero.

Therefore, every man, for the ſake of others as well as himſelf, is not to diſable his body or mind by ſuch irregularities, as make him leſs ſerviceable to them.

In ſhort, conſidering the variety of circumſtances men are under and theſe continually changing, as well as being for the moſt part unforeſeen; it is impoſſible to have rules laid down by any *external* revelation for every particular caſe; and therefore, there muſt be ſome ſtanding rule, diſcoverable by the light of nature, to direct us in all ſuch caſes. And we cannot be more certain, that it is the will of God, that thoſe effects which flow from natural cauſes ſhould ſo flow; than we are, that it is the will of God, that men ſhould obſerve, whatever the nature of things, and the relation they have to one another, make fit to be obſerved; or in other words, we cannot but know, if we in the leaſt conſider, that, whatever circumſtances men are placed in, by the univerſal cauſe of all things; that it is his eternal and immutable will, by his placing them in theſe circumſtances, that they act as theſe require. It is abſurd to imagine we are obliged to act thus in ſome caſes, and not in others; when the reaſon for acting thus in all is the ſame. This conſideration alone will direct a man how to act in all conditions of life, whether father, ſon, huſband, ſervant, ſubject, maſter, king, &c. Thus we ſee how the reaſon of things, or the relation they have to each other, teaches us our duty in all caſes whatſoever. And I may add, that the better to cauſe men to obſerve thoſe rules, which make for their mutual benefit, infinite goodneſs has ſown in their hearts ſeeds of pity, humanity and tenderneſs, which, without much difficulty, cannot be eradicated; but nothing operates more ſtrongly than that deſire men have of being in eſteem, credit, and reputation with their fellow creatures, not to be obtained without acting on the principles of natural juſtice, equity, benevolence, &c.

In a word, as a moſt beneficent diſpoſition in the Supreme being is the ſource of all his actions in relation to

his creatures; so he has implanted in man, whom he has made after his own image, a love for his species; the gratifying of which, in doing acts of benevolence, compassion and good will, produces a pleasure that never satiates; as, on the contrary, actions of ill-nature, envy, malice, &c. never fail to produce shame, and everlasting self reproach.

And now let any one say, how it is possible God could more fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures, than by making every thing within, and without them a declaration of it, and an argument for observing it.

Having thus discovered our duty, we may be sure it will always be the same; since inconstancy, as it argues a defect either of wisdom or power, cannot belong to a being infinitely wise and powerful; what unerring wisdom has once instituted, can have no defects; and as God is entirely free from all partiality, his laws must alike extend to all times and places.

From these premises, I think, we may boldly draw this conclusion, that if religion consists in the practice of those duties, that result from the relation we stand in to God and man, our religion must always be the same. If God is unchangeable, our duty to him must be so too; if human nature continues the same, and men at all times stand in relation to one another, the duties which result from thence too, must always be the same: and consequently our duty both to God and man must, from the beginning of the world to the end remain unalterable; be always alike plain and perspicuous; neither changed in whole, or part: which demonstrates that no person, if he comes from God, can teach us any other religion, or give us any precepts but what are founded on those relations. Heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one tittle of this eternal law shall either be abrogated or altered.

To sum up all in few words; as nature teaches men to unite for their mutual defence and happiness, and government was instituted solely for this end; so to

make this more effectual, was religion, which reaches the thoughts, wholly ordain'd; it being impoſſible for God, in governing the world, to propoſe to himſelf any other end than the good of the governed; and conſequently, whoever does his beſt for the good of his fellow-creatures, does all that God or man requires. Thus from the conſideration of our own imperfections, which we continually feel; and the perfections of our creator, which we conſtantly find in all his works; we may arrive at the knowledge of our duty, both to our creator and fellow-creatures. Hence, I think, we may define true religion to conſiſt in a conſtant diſpoſition of mind to do all the good we can, and thereby render ourſelves acceptable to God in anſwering the end of his creation.

CHAP. III.

That the perfection and happineſs of all rational beings, ſupreme as well as ſubordinate, conſiſts in living up to the dictates of their nature.

TO make this, (ſince all our happineſs depends on it) if poſſible, more plain: The principle from which all human actions flow, is the deſire of happineſs; and God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have implanted this principle, this only innate principle in mankind, if he had not given them reaſon to diſcern what actions make for, and againſt their happineſs.

B. Wherein do you take the happineſs of rational creatures to conſiſt? Without knowing that, this controverſy cannot be determined; and when it is known, our diſpute muſt ſoon be ended.

A. The happineſs of all beings whatever conſiſts in the perfections of their nature; and the nature of a rational being is moſt perfect, when it is perfectly rational; that is, when it governs all its actions by the rules

of right reaſon; for then it arrives at the moſt perfect, and conſequently the happieſt ſtate a rational nature can aſpire to: and every deviation from the rules of right reaſon, being an imperfection, muſt carry with it a proportionable unhappineſs; and a man's happineſs and duty muſt conſiſt in the ſame things, ſince no one can be obliged to do any thing that does not ſome way or other contribute to his happineſs; and conſequently, according to the ſenſe men have of their own happineſs, and of the means which will naturally procure it, they may aſſuredly attain the knowledge of their reſpective duties.

B. If we know wherein the happineſs of God, who is neceſſarily happy, conſiſts, we might judge wherein conſiſts the happineſs of man made after God's own image; and whether happineſs, or miſery, are the neceſſary conſequence of his actions.

A. Becauſe this is a point of the higheſt conſequence, I ſhall ſpeak my ſentiments (that they may the better paſs with you) in the words of the judicious Dr. Scott, who ſays, "That which renders God ſo infinitely happy in himſelf, is not ſo much the almighty power he has to defend himſelf from foreign hurts or injuries, as the exact agreement of all his actions, with the all comprehending reaſon of his own mind. God loves not himſelf merely becauſe he is himſelf, but becauſe he is in all reſpects morally good, and his will and power perfectly compliant with the infalible dictates of his own reaſon: Hence ariſes his infinite complacency in himſelf, that there is nothing in him but what his own reaſon perfectly approves; no inclinations in his will or nature, but what are exactly agreeable to the faireſt ideas of his own mind."

If the perfection, and conſequently the happineſs of God, conſiſts in the purity and rectitude of his nature, we, as far as we can arrive to a like purity and rectitude, muſt be ſo far neceſſarily happy; ſince by living according to the rules of right reaſon, we more and more implant in us the moral perfections of God, from

which his happineſs is inſeparable. We then, if I may ſo ſay *live the life of God;* that is, we, in our place and ſtation, live after the ſame manner, and by the ſame rules as he does in his; and we do what God himſelf would do was he in our place; and there would be no other difference between his life and ours, but what ariſes from our different ſtates and relations; ſince the ſame rules would determine our wills as determine his will; and by our repeated acts of virtue, we ſhould be continually making nearer and nearer approaches to the moſt perfect and the moſt happy being. By this conduct, we, as the ſcriptures aſſure us, ſhould be made partakers of the divine nature, be born of God, and be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect; and can that be without being as happy as we are perfect? Hence we may contemplate the great dignity of our rational nature, ſince our reaſon for kind, though not for degree, is of the ſame nature as that of God's; nay, it is our reaſon which makes us the image of God himſelf, and is the common bond which unites Heaven and Earth; the creatures and creator; and if our happineſs is limited, it is becauſe our reaſon is ſo: It is God alone, who has an unlimited reaſon and happineſs.

The excellent author juſt now mentioned, ſays, "The beſt thing we can receive from God is himſelf, and himſelf we do receive in our ſtrict compliance with the eternal laws of goodneſs; which laws being tranſcribed from the nature of God, from his eternal righteouſneſs and goodneſs, we do, by obeying them, derive God's nature into our own; ſo that while we write after the copy of his laws, we write out the perfections of his being; and his laws being the ſeal on which he has engraven his nature, we, in obeying them, take impreſſion from them, and ſtamp his bleſſed nature on our own." Which, certainly, muſt make us neceſſarily happy, as a contrary conduct would make us unhappy. And, I think, I may venture to ſay, that could we ſuppoſe God himſelf to act otherwiſe, he would then be as unhappy as he now is happy; and his omnipo-

tency could not hinder him from being continually expoſed to the reproach of his own infallible reaſon.

From theſe premiſes, I think, we may conclude, that men, according as they do, or do not partake of the nature of God, muſt unavoidably be either happy or miſerable: And herein appears the great wiſdom of God, in making men's miſery and happineſs the neceſſary and inſeparable conſequence of their actions; and that rational actions carry with them their own reward, and irrational their own puniſhment: This, I think, can not be denied, as long as their are ſome actions naturally beneficial to us, and others as hurtful; and that there is no virtue, but what has ſome good inſeparably annexed to it; and no vice, but what as neceſſarily carries with it ſome evil: and if our rational nature is to be the ſame in the next life, as it is in this, our actions muſt produce effects of the ſame kind, and that too in a much higher degree.

In this life, it is true, we cannot be perfectly happy; as ſubject to diſeaſes and diſaſters: We are imperfect ourſelves, and have none to converſe with but imperfect creatures; and yet if we act according to the dictates of right reaſon, we ſhall receive, even here, true inward comfort and ſatisfaction; and hereafter, when we are freed from thoſe imperfections, complete happineſs: on the contrary, the man who abandons his reaſon, beſides the miſery of all ſorts of irrational conduct will bring on him, muſt feel in his mind, pain and anguiſh even in this life; and in the life to come, when there are no ſenſual things to divert his thoughts, inſupportable grief and miſery.

Though human law-givers are forced to have recourſe to puniſhments, which are not connected with the things they forbid; yet a being of infinite power is not thus ſtraitened, but may make one the neceſſary conſequence of the other: And, indeed, how can it be otherwiſe, ſince good and evil have their foundation in the eſſential difference of things, and their nature is fixed and immoveable: And conſequently, our happineſs de-

pends on the intrinsic nature of the one, and our misery on the intrinsic nature of the other.

As God, whose infinite wisdom sets him above being deceived, or influenced by any wrong affections, acts in constant conformity to the reason and nature of things; and it is a contradiction to his nature for him to do any thing that is not fit and reasonable; so he would have framed our nature in contradiction to his own, if he had obliged us to act otherwise. No, God can never give us commands repugnant to his own nature, or require us to do what he himself abhors to do. The end for which God has given us reason, is to compare things, and the relation they stand in to each other; and from thence to judge of the fitness and unfitness of actions; and could not our reason judge soundly in all such matters, it could not have answered the end for which infinite wisdom and goodness bestowed that excellent Gift; and for which we cannot adore enough the goodness of God.

Had God, from time to time, spoke to all mankind in their several languages, and his words had miraculously conveyed the same ideas to all persons; yet he could not speak more plainly than he has done by the things themselves, and the relation which reason shews there is between them: Nay, since it is impossible in any book, or books, that a particular rule could be given for every case, we must even then have had recourse to the light of nature to teach us our duty in most cases; especially considering the numberless circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, and make the same actions, according as men are differently affected by them, either good or bad. And I may add, that most of the particular rules laid down in the gospel for our direction, are spoken after such a figurative manner, that except we judge for their meaning, not merely by the letter, but what the law of nature antecedently declares to be our duty, they are apt to lead us wrong; And if precepts relating to morality are delivered after an obscure manner, when they

might have been delivered otherwiſe; what reaſon can you aſſign for its being ſo, but that infinite wiſdom meant to refer us to that law, for the explaining them? Sufficient inſtances of this nature I ſhall give you hereafter; though I muſt own, I cannot carry this point ſo far as a learned divine, who repreſents the ſcriptures more obſcure (which one would think impoſſible) than even the Fathers. He tells us, "That a certain author (viz. Flaccus Illyricus) has furniſhed us with one and fifty reaſons for the obſcurity of the ſcriptures;" adding, "I think, I may truly ſay that the writings of the prophets and apoſtles abound with tropes and metaphors, types and allegories, parables and dark ſpeeches; and are as much, nay, much more unintelligible in many places, than the writings of the ancients." It is well this author, who talks of people being ſtark *bible-mad*, ſtopped here; and did not with a celebrated wit* cry, The truly illuminated books are the darkeſt of all.

The writer above-mentioned ſuppoſes it impoſſible, that God's will ſhould be fully revealed by books; "Except, ſays he, it might be ſaid perhaps without a figure, that even the word itſelf could not contain the books which ſhould be written." But with ſubmiſſion to this reverend perſon, I cannot help thinking, but that (ſuch is the divine goodneſs) God's will is ſo clearly, and fully manifeſted in the book of nature, that he who runs may read it.

This cannot be denied, if the book of nature ſhews us in character legible by the whole world, the relation we ſtand in to God and our fellow-creatures, and the duties reſulting from thence; for then it muſt teach us the whole of our duty, ſince it would be unjuſt and tyrannical in any being, to require more of others than the relation they ſtand in to him makes it their duty to pay; it being that relation alone which gives him his juſt power and authority. We are encompaſſed with many artificial relations, ſuch as governor and governed, maſter and ſervant, huſband and wife, &c. and the end of theſe relations teaches us what they require; and

* Dean Swift.

they being entered into for the ſake of each other's aſſiſtance, either party is injured by the others not obſerving what theſe relations demand, or by exacting more than the end of entering into them requires.

Though the relation we ſtand in to God, is not artificial as moſt are amongſt men, who want each other's aſſiſtance; but is natural at leaſt on our part; yet this does not hinder, but that we may know by reaſon, the end he had in being related to us as creator and governor; and what he requires of his creatures and ſubjects: This the divine nature, which contains in itſelf all perfection, and all happineſs, plainly points out to us. And if we are once certain of the end of God's entering into this relation with man, we may be as certain from his wiſdom and goodneſs, and all his divine perfections, that he will require no more of us than the end he had in entering into this relation requires.

If it would be unjuſt and tyrannical in an earthly governor, to exact things of his ſubjects, that do not contribute to the end for which this relation between them was entered into; can we ſuppoſe a governor of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, who has always in his mind the end for which he governs mankind, will act the tyrant, and put them under ſevere penalties for not obſerving ſuch things as have no relation to the end for which he created, and governs them?

There is no relation among men without a mutual obligation ariſing from it; parents owe a duty to children as well as children to parents; but are not we in a ſtricter ſenſe, the children of God, and parents only inſtruments in his hands? ſince it is God, who from nothing brings us into being, frames us after the manner that beſt pleaſes him, imprints on us what faculties, inclinations, deſires and paſſions he thinks fit: And is not God from his innate goodneſs and equity, under an obligation to treat us more kindly than earthly parents do their beſt-belovedchildren,who beget them without deſign? Whereas God,whoſe actions are governed by infinite goodneſs, could have no motive to bring us in-

to being (which of itſelf is no bleſſing) but our good; and for the ſame reaſon preſerves us in being: nor can ſo kind and tender a parent play the tyrant, and impoſe commands on us, which do not flow from the relations we ſtand in to him, and to one another.

If we conſider what our reaſon informs us of the nature of our great creator and governor, we cannot fail of knowing our duty; for as Dr. Scott juſtly obſerves, "If you will ſerve the great king of the world in ſuch ways as are pleaſing and acceptable to him, you muſt ſtudy his nature, and inform your ſelves which way his infinite perfections incline, that you may know how to comport yourſelves towards him, and to render him ſuch ſervices as are agreeable to his nature; for there is no rule in the world, but only than of his nature, by which you can certainly conclude what will pleaſe him.———So that in all our enquiries what is pleaſing to God, our laſt appeal muſt be to his nature, which is the great ſtandard of good and evil; by which we are to meaſure what is pleaſing and diſpleaſing to him."

If then, with this judicious author, you allow, that we are to meaſure what is pleaſing and diſpleaſing to God, (which takes in the whole of religion) from what our reaſon teaches concerning his nature, you allow all I contend for.

In ſhort, if the relations between things, and the fitneſs reſulting from thence, be not the ſole rule of God's actions, muſt not God be an arbitrary being? and then what a miſerable condition will mankind be in! Since an arbitrary will might change every moment, and thoſe things which entitled men to God's favor to day, might make them incur his diſpleaſure to-morrow: Nay, he might at the ſame time have a ſecret will oppoſite to his revealed will; or have different wills for every different perſon; or might reveal his arbitrary commands ſo obſcurely, as to cauſe the utmoſt confuſion; but if God only commands what the nature of things ſhew to be fit, it is ſcarce poſſible, that men (though now end-

leſsly divided upon the account of their different traditions) ſhould miſtake the duty; ſince a mind that is attentive can as eaſily diſtinguiſh fit from unfit, as the eye can beauty from deformity, or the ear harmony from diſcord: and if no commands can alter the nature of things, or make that fit which is in itſelf unfit, external revelation muſt attend the nature and relation of things, and can only ſpeak what thoſe ſpeak. As for inſtance, it is not in our power, though ever ſo often commanded, to love the Deity, while we conceive him an arbitrary being acting out of humor and caprice; nor could any commands ſuppoſing ſuch poſſible, oblige us not to love him, while we believe him a kind and benificent being; ſo that as long as we have right notions of God, we cannot but love, and adore him as we ought.

Thus, I think, I have fully proved from the nature of God and man, and the relations we ſtand in to him and one another, that the divine precepts cannot vary; and that theſe relations, which are the permanent voice of God, by which he ſpeaks to all mankind, do at all times infallibly point out to us our duty in all its various circumſtances of life.

Should revelation require leſs than thoſe relations require, would it not be an imperfect rule? And if it enjoins more, would it not argue the author of it to be of a tyrannical nature, impoſing on his ſubjects, and under moſt ſevere penalties, unneceſſary things; and likewiſe ſhew a deſign, not of being beloved, but hated and dreaded; And therefore, thoſe who ſee the conſequences of things, deſcribe the chriſtian religion as requiring ſuch things only, as conſidering the relations we ſtand in to God and one another, are apparently for our good.

The moſt accurate Dr. Barrow gives this character of the chriſtian religion, "That its precepts are no other than ſuch as phyſicians preſcribe for the health of our bodies; as politicians would allow to be needful for the peace of the ſtate; as Epicurian philoſophers re-

commend for the tranquility of our minds, and pleasures of our lives; such as reason dictates, and daily shews conducive to our welfare in all respects; which consequently, were there no law enacting them, we should in wisdom choose to observe, and voluntarily impose them on our selves; confessing them to be fit matters of law, as most advantageous and requisite to the good, general and particular, of mankind."

That great and good man Dr. Tillotson says, "That all the precepts of christianity are reasonable and wise, requiring such duties as are suitable to the light of nature, and do approve themselves to the best reason of mankind; such as have their foundation in the nature of God, and are an imitation of the divine excellencies; such as tend to the perfection of human nature, and to raise the minds of men to the highest pitch of goodness and virtue.————They command nothing that is unnecessary, they omit nothing that may tend to the glory of God, or the welfare of men, nor do they restrain us in any thing, but what is contrary to the regular inclinations of nature, or to our reason, and true interest; they forbid us nothing but what is base and unworthy to serve our humors and passions, to make ourselves fools and beasts.———In a word, nothing but what tends to our private harm, or prejudice, or to public disorder and confusion."

The late Dean of Canterbury, in a sermon preached in defence of christianity, says, "What can be more powerful incentive to obedience, than for a rational creature clearly to discern the equity, the necessity, the benefit, the decency and beauty of every action he is called to do, and thence to be duly sensible how gracious a master he serves; one that is so far from loading him with fruitless, arbitrary, and tyrannical impositions, that each command abstracted from his command who issues it, is able to recommend itself; and nothing required but what every wise man would choose of his own accord; and cannot without being his own enemy, wish to be exempted from." And this character of

chriſtianity he makes to be eſſential to its being from God, and therefore muſt make it the ſame with natural religion, which has this character impreſſed on it.

" There was none of the doctrines of our ſaviour (ſays the late archbiſhop of York) calculated for the gratification of mens idle curioſities, the buſying and amuſing them with airy and uſeleſs ſpeculations; much leſs were they intended for an exerciſe of our credulity, or a trial how far we could bring our reaſon to ſubmit to our faith: But as on the one hand they were plain and ſimple, and ſuch as by their agreeableneſs to the rational faculties of mankind, did highly recommend themſelves to our belief; ſo on the other hand they had an immediate relation to practice, and were the genuine principles and foundation, upon which all human and divine virtues were naturally to be ſuperſtructed."—— Does not every one ſee, that if the religion of nature had been put inſtead of chriſtianity, theſe deſcriptions would have exactly agreed with it?

The judicious Dr. Scott affirms, " God never impoſes laws on us *pro imperio*, as arbitrary teſts and trials of our obedience.——The great deſign of them, ſays he, is to do us good, and direct our actions to our own intereſt.—This, if we firmly believe, will infinitely encourage our obedience; for when I am ſure God commands me nothing but what my own health, eaſe, and happineſs requires; and that every law of his is both a neceſſary and ſovereign preſcription againſt the diſeaſes of my nature, and he could not preſcribe leſs than he has, without being defective in his care of my recovery and happineſs; with what prudence and modeſty can I grudge to obey him?"

Nay, the moſt conſiderable men, even among the Papiſts, do not ſcruple to maintain there is nothing in religion but what is moral. The divines of Port-Royal for inſtance ſay, " All the precepts, and all the myſteries that are expreſſed in ſo many different ways in the holy volumes, do all center in this one commandment, of loving God with all our heart, and in loving our

neighbors as ourſelves: For the ſcripture (it is St. Auſtin who ſays it) forbids but one only thing, which is concupiſence, or the love of the creature; as it commands but one only thing, which is charity, and the love of God: Upon this double precept is founded the whole ſyſtem of the Chriſtian religion; and it is unto this, ſay they, according to the expreſſion of Jeſus Chriſt, that all the ancient law and prophets have reference; and we may add alſo, all the myſteries, and all the precepts of the new law: For love, ſays St. Paul, is the fulfilling of the law." And theſe divines likewiſe cite a remarkable paſſage of St. Auſtin on this ſubject; viz. "He that knows how to love God, and to regulate his life by that love, knows all that the ſcripture propounds to be known." They alſo have quoted a known ſaying of his father, *Omnia peccata ſunt in univerſum contra rationem & naturæ legem.* And I might add the authority of a greater man, and a Papiſt too, who ſays, "Religion adds nothing to natural probity, but the conſolation of doing that for love and obedience to our heavenly Father, which reaſon itſelf requires us to do in favor of virtue." And the famous *Pere Queſnelle* ſays on *Acts* 2. 21. *Le vrai culte n'eſt plus attache a un peuple; le Chriſtianiſme eſt une religion univerſelle.*

B. Do divines always give this character of chriſtianity, do they never diſtinguiſh it from the religion of nature, by ſuppoſing it contains certain arbitrary precepts?

A. When they conſider how repugnant it is to the nature of God to give any arbitrary commands, then indeed the force of truth obliges them to declare there is nothing in religion but what tends to the good of mankind; but if at any time they talk otherwiſe, it is for the ſake of ſuch things as either directly or indirectly ſerve their intereſt. But to remove all ſcruples, I ſhall more fully prove.

CHAP. IV.

That not only the matter of all God's laws, but the penalties annexed to them, are for the good of mankind; even for those who suffer for the breach of them.

B. SHOULD I allow you, that the natural knowledge we have of God is the foundation of all religion, and that arguing from the divine attributes is a moſt certain way of reaſoning, yet is not God's glory one of his divine attributes? And does not the wiſeſt of men ſay, that God made all things for himſelf, and the wicked for the day of evil;* and conſequently God's glory, rather than the good of man, occaſioned the almighty to create man, and to give him laws?

A. As to this text, I ſhall anſwer you from archbiſhop Tillotſon; that "If by God's making all things for himſelf, be meant, that he aimed at and intended the manifeſtation of his wiſdom, power, and goodneſs in the creation of the world, it is moſt true, that in this ſenſe he made all things for himſelf; but if we underſtand it ſo, as if the goodneſs of his nature did not move him thereto, but that he had ſome deſign to ſerve, ends and neceſſities of his own, upon his creatures, this is far from him; but it is very probable, that neither of theſe are the meaning of the text, which may be rendered with much better ſenſe, and nearer to the Hebrew thus; God hath ordained every thing to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained for the day of evil; that is, the wiſdom of God hath fitted one thing to another; puniſhment to ſin, the evil day to the evil doers." This is the ſenſe that Grotius, and moſt of the beſt commentators put on the text. And here let me add, that if there are in-

* Prov. 16. 4.

numerable places as capable of different interpretations, even with relation to God and his attributes, this, ſure, will be no argument not to adhere to what the light of nature teaches us in this matter; ſince where texts may be taken in different ſenſes, things are as much left to be determined by our reaſon, as if there were no ſuch texts. And when we meet with expreſſions of God's doing any thing for his own glory, they can only mean, that ſuch is the tranſcendent excellency of his nature, ſuch the inexpreſſible marks of his wiſdom and power in all his works, that he could not have given greater, had he deſigned nothing but his own glory. And when we impute the glory of all we do to him, we thereby ſignify, that we have no power, but what we derive from him; and that we deſire to acknowledge him the author of whatever is praiſe-worthy in us.

B. Though it be allowed, that God framed his laws, and conſequently, the ſanctions that make them laws, for the good of man; yet a due regard to his own honor, the dignity of his laws and government, will oblige him to puniſh thoſe, who violate his laws, as for an injury done to himſelf, diſtinct from the harm that by the breach of them accrues to his creatures.

A. As no man breaks the divine laws out of contempt to his maker, or imagines he can do God an injury; ſo God does not make laws for one end, and require the obſerving them for another; that being inconſiſtent with the dignity of the divine legiſlator, his laws and government: But as it was for the ſake of man that he gave him laws, ſo he executes them purely for the ſame reaſon; ſince upon his own account, he cannot be in the leaſt affected, whether his laws be, or be not obſerved; and conſequently in puniſhing, no more than rewarding, does he act as a party, much leſs an injured party, who wants ſatisfaction, or reparation of honor. And indeed, to ſuppoſe it, is highly to diſhonor him, ſince God, as he never can be injured, ſo he can never want reparation; and he who

is infinitely satisfied in himself, can gain no addition of satisfaction by his creatures observing his laws; nor can he, by their not observing them, be reduced to a condition of wanting satisfaction, or reparation of honor, or any of those things, which, depending on the opinion of others, are main ingredients in human happiness: and yet even among men, none ought to be punished, (since what is past cannot be helped) but to prevent a future breach of the law; and all laws being designed for the good of the governed. "The greatest monarch is not to punish the breach of his laws any otherwise, than the most petty state:" And though all own, it would be tyranny in an earthly governor to multiply punishments, on pretence of vindicating the honor of the legislator; or as the breach of law is an injury done to him, and such like; yet some are not ashamed to impute such tyranny to God, and thereby take off from that esteem and love men must have for him, did they believe he only punished when, and no further than their good required.

Do not we bring God down to ourselves, when we suppose he acts like us poor indigent creatures, in seeking worship and honor for his own sake; nay do we not cloath him, who has neither parts nor passions, with the worst of our infirmities, if we represent him as an ambitious, suspicious, wrathful, and revengeful being?

If we dare consult our reason, it will tell us that jealousy in point of honor and power, love of fame and glory can only belong to limited creatures; but are as necessarily excluded from unlimited, absolutely perfect being, as anger, revenge, and such like passions; which would make the Deity resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent part of our nature, rather than the manly, noble and generous.

Could God, strictly speaking, be made angry, provoked, or grieved by the conduct of us wretched mortals, he would not enjoy a moment's quiet; but must be much more miserable than the most unhappy of his creatures. Or,

Had God any comfort or ſatisfaction to gain from the thoughts and actions of his creatures, he would never have been without an infinity of them jointly contributing to this end.

If religion in general, and every part of it was not uſeful to mankind, there would be no reaſon why they ſhould know it more than other animals; who though they have wonderful talents (in many of which they exceed men) given them by God for preſerving themſelves and their ſpecies, yet are utter ſtrangers to religion, as a thing wholly uſeleſs to them.

The ſum of what I have been ſaying is fully expreſſed by Job in theſe words; If thou ſinneſt, what doſt thou againſt him? Or if thy tranſgreſſion be multiplied, what doſt thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what giveſt thou him; Or what receiveth he at thy hands? Thy wickedneſs may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteouſneſs profit the ſon of man.* Or, as Eſdras ſays, What is man that thou ſhouldſt take diſpleaſure at him? Or what is a corruptible generation, that thou ſhouldſt be ſo bitter towards it.†

Our greateſt felicity conſiſts in having ſuch an impartial and diſintereſted judge as well as legiſlator, that whether he puniſhes, or rewards, he acts alike for our good; that being the end of all his laws, and conſequently of the penalties as well as rewards which make them laws: whereas your common ſyſtems of divinity repreſent him full of wrath and fury, ready to glut himſelf with revenge for the injuries he has ſuffered by the breach of his laws.

B. Is not God's juſtice as well as his mercy a divine attribute, and will not that as much oblige him to puniſh the breakers of his laws, as if he had been, as he is ſometimes repreſented, full of anger, wrath and revenge?

A. Though juſtice and mercy cannot at the ſame time be exerciſed in one and the ſame inſtance on the ſame ſubject; yet your ſyſtem-writers, leſt they ſhould

* Chap. 35. 6. † 2 Eſdras 8. 34.

limit theſe two attributes in God, extend them alike to all perſons, which is making him neither juſt, nor merciful; becauſe theſe attributes drawing contrary ways, muſt hinder each other's effect.

B. I muſt confeſs, I do not ſee how the ſame act can be an act both of juſtice and mercy in relation to the ſame perſon: or how it can be ſaid that God does juſtice to a ſinner, when he ſhews mercy to him; and yet we muſt ſuppoſe the juſtice as well as mercy of God to be infinite.

A. The juſtice by which God is righteous in all his actions, and the mercy by which he is good or beneficent, are infinite, and eternally inherent in the divine nature; but theſe oblige not God either to puniſh or pardon any further than his infinite wiſdom ſees fit; and ſuch puniſhing and pardoning are tranſient acts, the effects of his will, not properties belonging to his nature. Juſtice and mercy among men relate to different ſubjects: when the magiſtrate puniſhes a criminal, it is an act of juſtice to the public; and when he pardons him, it is an act of mercy to the criminal, though an act of injuſtice to the public; except in ſuch circumſtances, where he has ground to believe that pardoning him may be no diſadvantage to the public, whoſe intereſt it is not to loſe a uſeful member.

The greateſt difference in this caſe between God and man is, that the moſt powerful monarch on earth is of the ſame nature with his ſubjects, and his good involved in the good of the whole, and by the breach of his laws may be injured; and as a party injured, may exact reparation and ſatisfaction: But this without blaſphemy cannot be ſaid of God, whoſe nature is infinitely happy in himſelf before there was any creature to adore him, or be obedient to his will; ſo he muſt ſtill be ſuch, though none of them did obey his laws, or acknowledge his being; and therefore, in doing acts of juſtice he cannot, like the monarchs of this world, propoſe any ſecurity to himſelf, but acts purely for the good of his creatures, and the effects of his juſtice (they never ex-

tending to annihilation) muſt not be only for the good of others, but even of the perſons puniſhed; becauſe God, whoſe love infinitely exceeds that of mortal parents, chaſtiſes his children (and all mankind are alike his offspring) becauſe he loves them, and deſigns their amendment: And the reaſon why God in ſcripture is ſaid to be love, muſt be becauſe all his acts, by what name ſoever you call them, are acts of pure, impartial, and diſintereſted love.

All puniſhment for puniſhment's ſake is mere cruelty and malice, which can never be in God; nor can he hate any thing that is made, or be ſubject to ſuch weakneſs or impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of ſpite, wrath, revenge, or any ſelf-intereſt; and conſequently, whatever puniſhment he inflicts, muſt be a mark of his love, in not ſuffering his creatures to remain in that miſerable ſtate, which is inſeparable from ſin and wickedneſs.

As God's infinite goodneſs appears in the ſanctions as well as matter of his laws, ſo his infinite wiſdom knows how to adjuſt the puniſhment to the offence; that it may be exactly fitted to produce the deſired amendment.

B. Does not your ſuppoſing that God has no other motive in executing his laws, than he had in making them; viz. the good of his creatures; and that all puniſhment muſt bear an exact proportion to the offence it is deſigned to amend, ſtrike at the abſolute eternity of hell-torments? Since there is no proportion betwen temporary injuries done to all men, and eternal miſery of but one man; nor can everlaſting torment work amendment.

A. I ſhall at preſent refer you to Dr. Burnet *de Statu Mortuorum*, and only ſay with archbiſhop Tillotſon, "The right that God hath in his creatures is founded in the benefits he hath conferred on them and the obligation they have to him on that account. Now there is none, who becauſe he has done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater evil than the good he has done amounts to; and I think it next to madneſs

to doubt, whether extreme, and eternal misery be not a greater evil than simple being is a good." But at a proper time I shall consider what may be said from scripture as well as reason, for the doctrine of the absolute eternity of torments; and what will be the condition of those, who die before they are capable of undergoing a trial; or knowing any thing of religion. A subject, which, I think, has scarce been considered by any one.

CHAP. V.

That God requires nothing for his own sake; no, not the worship we are to render him, nor the faith we are to have in him.

B. YOUR arguing from the nature of God, that every thing, consequently faith in him, and even the worship and service we render to him, is wholly for our own sake, will hardly go down with the bulk of mankind, who imagine, they by those acts do him some real service.

A. If they think so, it is a sign they have not been well instructed; the most eminent of our divines would teach them, that prayer itself, God knowing before-hand what we will ask, chiefly becomes a duty, as it raises in us a due contemplation of the divine attributes, and an acknowledgement of his great and constant goodness, and serves to keep up a constant sense of our dependence on him; and as it disposes us to imitate those perfections we adore in him, in being kind and beneficent to one another. There are few so gross as to imagine, we can direct infinite wisdom in the dispensation of providence, or persuade him to alter those laws he contrived before the foundation of the world for putting things in a regular course.

" It is, says archbishop Tillotson, a great condescention and goodness in him, to accept our imperfect prais-

es, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as worthily good, as he is gre t and glorious, he would not ſuffer us to ſully his great and glorious name by taking it in our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happineſs to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happineſs and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and diſpenſe with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and were it not for his goodneſs, might deſpiſe the praiſes of his creatures, with infinitely more reaſon than wiſe men do the applauſe of fools."

"To imagine, as Dr. Scott obſerves, that God needs our ſervices, and requires them to ſerve his own intereſt, is to blaſpheme his all-ſufficiency. and ſuppoſe him a poor indigent being, who for want of perfect ſatisfaction within himſelf, is forced to roam abroad, and raiſe taxes on his creatures, to enrich and ſupply himſelf: So that whatſoever ſome high flown enthuſiaſts may pretend, that it is ſordid and mercenary to ſerve God for our good, I am ſure, to ſerve him for his good, is profane and blaſphemous."

As able a divine as this, or perhaps any other age has produced, Le Clerk, obſerves, that "nothing can be more falſe, or contrary to the nature of the goſpel, than to fancy God in part deſigned to ſhew he was maſter, by enjoining ſome commands, which have no relation to the good of mankind; religion was revealed for us, and not for God; who, abſolutely ſpeaking, neither wants what we think of him, nor the worſhip we pay him, but has manifeſted himſelf to us only to make us happy." And therefore, if from exceſs of devotion, a man neglects the duties of civil life, he is ſo far from doing a thing acceptable to God, that he miſtakes the end of religion, which is to render him as perfect as may be in all moral duties whatever.

If any command was ever given for the ſake of God, it muſt certainly be relating to the inſtitution of the ſabbath; and yet we find it ſaid, The ſabbath is made for man, and not man for the ſabbath: So true is it in di-

vinity as well as politics, that The good of the people is the ſupreme law.

In ſhort, the worſhip God requires, is either for his own ſake, which ſuppoſes his happineſs ſome way or other depends on it; or elſe (except he requires things to no purpoſe) for the ſake of men, to raiſe and keep in their minds the contemplation of an infinitely good being, and of his laws, all founded on a diſintereſted love to the whole race of mankind. To imagine the worſhip of God is ordained on any other account, not only deſtroys one of the greateſt motives of mens doing good to one another; but ſuppoſes God not ſufficient for, or infinitely happy in himſelf; but ſubject to the paſſions of ambitious and vain-glorious mortals.

The generality of Chriſtians not only believe, that in worſhipping God they do him real ſervice, but think he is extremely uneaſy, if public worſhip is not performed in ſuch a manner, and with ſuch rites and ceremonies; and being endleſsly divided about theſe trifles, think they make their court to heaven, and highly oblige an omnipotent being, in deſtroying thoſe formidable enemies of God, who preſume, without their leave, to worſhip him after that manner they judge agreeable to his will. And,

There are no meaſures, though ever ſo deſtructive, but what they, who do not conſider the end of God's laws, may be brought into; as all hiſtory ſufficiently proves. The Jews not only thought that doing the greateſt good on their ſabbath, was profaning the day; but were ſuperſtitious as to think, that all-ſelf defence was then unlawful; and therefore durſt not lift up their hands againſt their enemies, who butchered them as they pleaſed: And many of the primitive fathers tho't the goſpel forbid all ſelf-defence; and herein they are followed by a modern ſect, who are their ſtrict imitators in moſt things.

It is no wonder, if ſome eccleſiaſtics have not been very forward to teach people, that what worſhip God requires of them, is for their own ſakes; ſince then

they could not, on pretence of that worſhip, have claimed ſuch powers and privileges, as are inconſiſtent with the common good; and people might then think it their duty ſo to regulate matters, as that their prieſts, upon the whole, conſidering the charge of maintaining them, and other incidents, ſhould do more good than hurt: Which can never happen, till men are taught it is their duty to do good to all, notwithſtanding their wideſt differences as to worſhip, or any other matter of meer religion; and it is to the honor of our clergy at preſent, that ſo many of them now endeavor to infuſe ſuch humane and benevolent principles into a people, who, not long ſince, thought they ſhewed a ſufficient zeal for religion, in hating thoſe their prieſts hated, without knowing wherefore; and, fired by their pulpit invectives, thought it their duty to pull down houſes of religious worſhip, and were ready at the direction of their impious leaders, to have perpetrated worſe crimes.

B. There is one difficulty, which to me ſeems inſuperable, how to make the faith reqaired by the religion of nature and of the goſpel, to have the ſame views, and tend to the ſame end.

A. If faith in God himſelf, no more than in any other act of religion, is not required for God's ſake, but our own; can faith in one ſent by God be required for any other end? Eſpecially conſidering, that no perſon is ever the more known to poſterity, becauſe his name is tranſmitted to them. When we ſay, Cæſar conquered Pompey, we have no idea of either, can only mean, ſome-body conquered ſome-body; and have we more diſtinct ideas of Jeſus and Pilate? And though we had a perſonal idea of the former, he could receive no advantage, or diſadvantage by what we thought of him. And if faith in him was required for a cauſe antecedent to his being ſo ſent, founded in his and our nature, and the relation we always ſtood in to him; would not the eternal reaſon of things have made it manifeſt? That which concerned all, muſt be knowable by all, for which reaſon the apoſtle ſays, That which may be

known of God (and none can know that which may not be known) was manifeſt in the gentiles. And,

The end of Chriſt's coming ſeems not to teach men new duties, but (repentance being the firſt thing preached by him and his apoſtles both to Jews and Gentiles) to repent of the breach of known duties. And Jeſus does not ſay, He was ſent to all Iſrael, but to the loſt ſheep of the houſe of Iſrael;* and that the Son of man is come to ſave that which was loſt:† And his parable about the loſt ſheep, ſuppoſed all were not loſt.‡ And when it was objected to him, that he kept company with ſinners, he owns the charge, and ſays, The whole need no phyſician, but they that are ſick;§ which would have been an improper anſwer, if he thought that all ſtood in need of him, and his ſpiritual phyſic. And to confirm this, he adds, I am not come to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance: and that there is more joy in Heaven for one ſinner that repents, than ninety-nine juſt perſons that need no repentance.‖ Which is dividing mankind into two parts, the whole or righteous, and the ſick or ſinners; and that his buſineſs was intirely with the latter. The not obſerving this diſtinction, has been the occaſion of many uncharitable and groſs miſtakes; and it is ſomewhat ſtrange, that Jeſus, who beſt knew how far his commiſſion extended, ſhould not be credited in this matter; eſpecially conſidering that in religion there are no noſtrums, or ſecrets, but all may know what God requires of all; and there is but one univerſal remedy for all ſick perſons, repentance and amendment. And if God, who is no reſpecter of perſons, will judge the world in righteouſneſs; and they that in every nation fear him, and work righteouſneſs, ſhall be accepted of him; they certainly, are whole, and need no phyſician, who do of themſelves what will make them acceptable to him; living as thoſe whom Chriſt came to reform were taught to live: Is it not abſurd to ſuppoſe, that till then none had ſufficient means

* Matt. 15. 24. † Ib. 18. 11. ‡ Luke 15. 7. § Matt. 9. 12. ‖ Ib. 13.

given them to anſwer the end for which all were created?

The Catholic epiſtle of St. Barnabas will inform you of the ſentiments of the ancients on this head. This great apoſtle (as tranſlated by Dr. Wake) ſays, "That Jeſus, when he choſe his apoſtles, which were afterwards to publiſh the goſpel, took men who had been very great ſinners; that thereby he might plainly ſhew, that He came not to call the righteous, but ſinners to repentance." * The words are fuller in the Original, ONTAS HUPER PAS AN HAMARTIAN ANOMOTEROUS.

B. This may be a forged paſſage.

A. Origen owns it to be genuine, for when Celſus (I will give you his own words in the latin tranſlation) ſays, *Jeſum aſcitis decem undecimve famoſi hominibus, publicanis nautiſque neqiſſimis, cum his ultro citroque fugitaſſe, corrogantem cibos ſordide ac turpiter.* Origen ſays, *extat ſane in Barnabæ catholica epiſtola ſcriptum, ad apoſtolicam functionem elegiſſe homines omni iniquitate iniquiores.* And it may be ſaid in ſupport of St. Barnabas, that the apoſtles firſt became Jeſus's diſciples upon temporal motives; and the belief of Chriſt's temporal kingdom was ſo firmly rooted in them, that Jeſus neither during his life, nor even after his reſurrection was able to remove it. At the laſt ſupper there was a ſtrife amongſt them, Who ſhould be accounted the greateſt? † "The meaneſt (as biſhop Parker expreſſes it) hoped at leaſt to have been made Lord Mayor of Capernaum." And even at his aſſention the only queſtion his diſciples aſked was, Lord, wilt thou at this time reſtore again the kingdom to Iſrael? ‡

But to take away all ſubterfuges, what can be more required than ſuch qualifications as will make Jeſus in the laſt day declare, Come ye bleſſed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world? And what are thoſe qualifications, but living up to the law of reaſon, in exerciſing acts of be-

* Matt. 9. 13. † Luke 22. 24. ‡ Acts 1. 6.

nevolence, goodneſs, &c. ? That this was the *unum neceſſarium* is plain from his anſwer, depart from me, ye that work iniquity, made to thoſe who had omitted theſe things; though they pleaded, they had propheſied in his name, and in his name caſt out devils, and done many wonderful works * St. Paul. in his firſt chapter to the Romans, ſhews, that the Gentiles could not plead ignorance of their duty, either to God or man, and as ſinning againſt knowledge, were inexcuſable ; and purſuing the ſame ſubject in the ſecond, he ſays, that God who is no reſpecter of perſons will deal with every one both Jew and Gentile according to their deeds ; and thoſe by which they are to be judged are either moral or immoral : and had there been any thing elſe required by the written law, it could not be ſaid that the Gentiles, who were ignorant of their duty either to God or man, did by nature the things contained in the law.

And does not St. Paul, in another place, put our future ſtate on the ſame foot, in ſuppoſing we ſhall be dealt with at the laſt day according to what we have done in the body, whether good or bad.† In ſhort, if the tree is to be known by its fruit, and it brings forth good fruit, the means by which this good fruit is to be produced are not material ; but if it does not, no means whatever can hinder it from being hewn down and caſt into the fire.‡ "The grand deciding queſtion (ſays Dr. South) at the laſt day, will be not what you have ſaid, or what you have believed : but what you have done more than orhers. God is pleaſed to vouchſafe the beſt he can give, only to the beſt we can do." But to go on to the bottom of this matter :

Faith conſidered in itſelf can neither be a virtue, or a vice ; becauſe men can no otherwiſe believe than as things appear to them : nay, can there be an higher affront to God than to ſuppoſe, he requires men to judge otherwiſe than the faculties he has given them enable them to do ? Or what can be more abſurd than to imagine, that God will ſhew his favor to one for believing

* Matt. 7, 22, 23. † 2 Cor. 5 10 ‡ Matt. 7 19.

what he could not but believe; and his diſpleaſure to another for not believing what he could not believe? And therefore, faith is only to be eſteemed by the works it produces; for the ſtrongeſt faith may be worſe than no faith at all. The devils themſelves (who are held the moſt wicked beings in the univerſe) believe, and tremble. Happy had it been for Chriſtendom, if zeal for what the prevailing parties called, the orthodox faith, had made none but themſelves to tremble!

Dr. Whitby expreſſes himſelf very accurately on this point: "Belief, or diſbelief, can neither be a virtue, or a crime in any one, who uſes the beſt means in his power of being informed. If a propoſition is evident, we cannot avoid believing it; and where is the merit or piety of a neceſſary aſſent? If it is not evident we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it: And where is the crime of not performing impoſſibilities, or not believing what does not appear to us to be true?" What worſe opinion can we have of the divine goodneſs than to imagine a mean denial of our reaſon, or a wretched affectation of believing any point too hard for our underſtanding, can entitle us to the favor of God.

If charity, which comprehends doing all poſſible good to our fellow creatures, is to be deſtroyed for the ſake of faith; or if incapacities, fines, impriſonments, rods, gibbets, racks and fire, are marks of charity, the Chriſtian world has outdone all mankind in acts of charity: but the deſcription St. Paul gives of charity, is ſo far from requiring us to make others ſuffer, that itſelf ſuffers long, ſeeks not her own, bears all things, endures all things;* and ſtrictly injoins us ſo to do.

Here is the practice of the Chriſtian world on the ſide of faith, ſacrificing charity, and all that is valuable to it; and on the other ſide, Chriſt and his apoſtles preferring charity before it. St. Paul, ſpeaking of himſelf, ſays, tho I have the gift of prophecy, and underſtand all myſteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, and could remove mountains, and have no chari-

* 1 Cor. 13.

ty, I am nothing; or though I give my body to be burnt, (which ſhews the higheſt act of faith) and have not charity, it profiteth nothing.* And in another place he ſays, above all things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectneſs.† And again; the end of the commandment is charity; and love is the fulfilling of the law.‡ And, if any provide not for his own, eſpecially thoſe of his own houſe (which is but one ſpecies of charity) he has denied the faith, and is worſe than an infidel.§ And St. Peter likewiſe ſpeaks as highly of it in ſaying, above all things, have fervent charity among yourſelves, for charity ſhall cover a multitude of ſins;‖ which cannot be ſaid of faith, becauſe that without charity profiteth nothing; in not anſwering the end for which it was given. And St. James calls love the royal law.¶ And St. John ſays, if any man ſays I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.** And is not he likewiſe a liar, who ſhews all the marks of hatred to his brother, and yet pretends to love him, and makes thoſe very marks an argument of his love. In Jeſus Chriſt, ſays the apoſtle Paul, neither circumciſion, nor uncircumciſion availeth any thing, but faith which worketh by love.††—For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, thou ſhalt love thy neighbor as thyſelf.‡‡ And Chriſt, in ſaying, by this ſhall all men know ye are my diſciples, if ye love one another;§§ ſuppoſes the love of men one to another ſo eſſential to Chriſtianity, as by that token alone all men may know who are his diſciples; and if they who thus love one another are of courſe his diſciples, whoſe diſciples then are they, who as all men know, make people hate and harraſs one another; and pretend Chriſt's commiſſion for ſo doing?

Origen, ſpeaking of the faith of Chriſtians, could not (was there any thing peculiar in their faith) have ſaid, "It is the conformity of our faith with the common innate notions of all mankind, that has given it en-

* 1 Cor. 13. † Col. 3. 14. ‡ 1 Tim. 1. 5. Rom. 13. 10. § 1 Tim. 5. 8. ‖ 1 Pet. 4. 8. ¶ James 2. 8. ** 1 John 4. 20. †† Gal. 5. 6. ‡‡ Ver. 14. §§ John 13. 35.

trance into the minds of candid and ingenuous hearers."

Our divines (ſince the liberty they enjoy has enabled them to think, and ſpeak their thoughts more freely than formerly) when they write in defence of Chriſtianity, endeavour to ſhew that the faith the ſcripture requires, is conformable to what Origen calls, the common and innate notions of mankind. I do not find, that the Dean of Sarum is cenſured for affirming in defence of chriſtianity, that, "the ſcripture notion of faith is very plain and obvious, *viz.* not a ſpeculative and philoſophical, but a religious and practical faith; and it is built on this principle, that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him; that religious faith is a full conviction of mind, that an eternal, immenſe being, infinitely wiſe, juſt, and good, not only actually exiſts, but is the governor of the world; preſcribes laws to the conſciences, and to the actions of men; takes notice of their compliance with, or tranſgreſſion of them; and will certainly reward or puniſh them, according as their works have been. To live under this ſenſe and expectation, is to live a life of faith, and is co-incident with a life of virtue. All the ſpecies, or particular inſtances of faith may be reduced to this, as ſo many branches ſpringing from it; and to explain them in any other ſenſe, as if faith and reaſon were oppoſed to each other, and religion and virtue two different things, is to bind the underſtanding of men, and confound the plaineſt, and moſt numerous texts of ſcripture."

Another learned divine, in defence of the chriſtian religion, ſays; "if it ſhould happen, that we cannot ſo ſatisfactorily evince the certainty of the ſcripture-hiſtory againſt ſcrupulous, nice, and ſceptical wits, yet we find ourſelves obliged to the belief and practice of what is really the Chriſtian religion; becauſe it is nothing elſe, as to the faith and morals of it, but natural religion."

The great Grotius, in a diſcourſe owned to be the beſt that was ever wrote in defence of Chriſtianity, lays it down as a maxim, that "it is abſolutely repugnant

to the goodneſs of God, that thoſe, who without reſpect to worldly advantage, ſeek after the way which leads to eternal happineſs: imploring withal the divine aſſiſtance, and ſubmitting themſelves entirely to his providence, ſhould be able to find it." And if this is too evident to be denied, can there be any thing either in relation to faith or manners in the way that leads to eternal happineſs, but may be found at all times and places of every one, who diligently ſearches after it.

And an eminent divine, who is not looked on to have altogether ſo extenſive a charity as Grotius, yet ſays, "I think we may pronounce ſafely in this matter, that the goodneſs and mercy of God is ſuch, that he never deſerts a ſincere perſon, nor ſuffers any one that ſhall live (even according to theſe meaſures of ſincerity) up to what he knows, to periſh for want of any knowledge neceſſary; and what is more, ſufficient to ſave him." Which ſuppoſes no faith, or knowledge neceſſary to ſalvation, but what all are capable of acquiring by virtue of that light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* And our ſavior himſelf ſays, ſeek, and you ſhall find.† By this you may ſee what faith is required, and for what end.

If man, as our divines maintain againſt Hobbs, is a ſocial creature, who naturally loves his own ſpecies, and is full of pity, tenderneſs and benevolence; and if reaſon, which is the proper nature of man, can never lead men to any thing but univerſal love and kindneſs, and there be no part of natural religion, or any faith it requires, but highly tends to improve this kind and benign temper; how comes it to paſs, that what is taught for religion in ſo many places of Chriſtendom, has transformed this mild and gentle creature into fierce and cruel; and made him act with rage and fury againſt thoſe who never did, or intended him the leaſt harm? Is not this chiefly owing to ſuch a faith as works not by love; and ſuch a zeal as, not being according to knowledge, has deſtroyed all good works; and is utterly inconſiſt-

* John 1. 9. † Matt. 7. 7.

ent with the end of all religion? But no wonder, if men, who moſt uncharitably damn one another for ſuch matters of faith as they dare not truſt reaſon to judge of, ſhould hate and perſecute each other on the ſame account.

The Epicureans, though they had exalted notions of their gods, yet becauſe they aſſerted it beneath their dignity to concern themſelves with human affairs, were at all times cenſured as atheiſts; which ſhews that it was accounted much the ſame to believe no Gods, as to believe them uſeleſs to mankind: but certainly, believing the deity to be indolent, cannot be ſo bad as believing him ſo cruel, as to oblige Chriſtians to perſecute, ruin, and deſtroy even their brethren, for things too, no ways contributing to the good of mankind; ſince this is downright demoniſm: And yet in what age of the church could not thoſe conſcientious people, that chanced to be undermoſt, have thought themſelves happy, if the men in power had not had a worſe notion of the deity, than that of indolence.

CHAP. VI.

That the religion of nature is an abſolutely perfect religion; and that external revelation can neither add to, nor take from its perfection; and that true religion, whether internally or externally revealed, muſt be the ſame.

HAVING proved, that God requires nothing for his own ſake; I ſhall now, the way being thus prepared, ſhew you, that the religion of nature is abſolutely perfect; and that external revelation can neither add to nor take from its perfection: and in order to it, let me aſk you, why you believe the goſpel a law of abſolute perfection, incapable of any addition, diminution, or alteration?

B. Becauſe it is the laſt law of God's giving.

A. Was it not such in itself, that could not make it so; since the law given to the Jews was for many ages the only external law; and yet, I suppose, you grant that this abrogated law was far from deserving such a character; but were there any thing in this argument, it makes wholly for the law of nature, since that is not only the first, but the last law of God's giving; if that can be said to be last, which is eternal: a law, by which God governs his own actions; and by which he expects all the rational world should govern theirs. And therefore, notwithstanding the promulgation of the gospel, he continues daily to implant it in the minds of all men Christians as well as others; and consequently, it is as necessary for them as for others; as necessary since, as before the coming of Christ: And I may add too, not only necessary to be observed in this world, and ten thousand more, were there so many, but in heaven itself, and that too forever.

B. Should I grant, that my argument, from the gospel's being the last law of God's giving, does not fully prove its absolute perfection; yet it will undeniably follow from the great agreement there is between that and the law of nature; it neither forbidding what that requires, nor requiring what that forbids; and in a word, containing nothing in it unworthy, but every thing worthy, of an absolutely-perfect Law-giver.

A. In saying this, you own the law of nature to be the standard of perfection; and that by it we must judge, antecedently to any traditional religion, what is, or is not a law absolutely perfect, and worthy of such a being for its legislator.

B. Indeed it must be owned, that divines as well as others, make the same concessions in relation to natural religion, which Dr. Prideaux does in his celebrated letter to the Deists, at the end of Mahomet's Life: "Let what is written in all the books of the New Testament be tried by that which is the touchstone of all religions; I mean, that religion of nature and reason, which God has written in the hearts of every one of us from the first

Creation ; and if it varies from it in any one particular, if it prefcribes any one thing which may in the minuteft circumftances thereof be contrary to its righteoufnefs, I will then acknowledge this to be an argument againft us, ftrong enough to overthrow the whole caufe, and make all things elfe that can be faid for it totally ineffectual for its fupport."

A. I defire no more than to be allowed, that there is a religion of nature and reafon, written in the hearts of every one of us from the firft creation ; by which all mankind muft judge of the truth of any inftituted religion whatever; and if it varies from the religion of nature and reafon in any one particular, nay in the minuteft circumftance, that alone is an argument which makes all things elfe that can be faid for its fupport totally ineffectual. If fo, muft not natural religion and external revelation, like two tallies, exactly anfwer one another, without any other difference between them, but as to the manner of their being delivered? And how can it be otherwife ? Can laws be imperfect, where a legiflator is abfolutely perfect? Can time difcover any thing to him, which he did not forefee from eternity? And as his wifdom is always the fame, fo is his goodnefs ; and confequently, from the conflideration of both thefe, his laws muft always be the fame.—Is it not from the infinite wifdom and goodnefs of God, that you fuppofe the gofpel a moft perfect law, incapable of being repealed, or altered, or of having additions ; and muft not you own the law of nature as perfect a law, except you will fay, that God did not arrive to the perfection of wifdom and goodnefs till about feventeen hundred years fince ?

To plead, that the gofpel is incapable of any additions, becaufe the will of God is immutable, and his laws too perfect to need them, is an argument, was Chriftianity a new religion, which deftroys itfelf ; fince from the time it commenced, you muft own God is mutable ; and that fuch additions have been made to the all-perfect laws of infinite wifdom, as conftitute a new religion. The reafon why the law of nature is immuta-

ble, is, because it is founded on the unalterable reason of things; but if God is an arbitrary being, and can command things merely from will and pleasure; some things to-day, and others to-morrow; there is nothing either in the nature of God, or in the things themselves, to hinder him from perpetually changing his mind. If he once commanded things without reason, there can be no reason why he may not endlessly change such commands.

I think, no man has more fully done justice to the law of nature, than a divine of that church which requires so many things contrary to that law; I mean the celebrated Charron, in his treatise of wisdom, whose authority is certainly not the less for being translated by the late Dean of Canterbury: he says, "The law of nature, by which I mean universal reason and equity, is the candle of our maker, lighted up in every breast, to guide, and shine perpetually. This is the dictate of God himself, he is the king, and this is the fundamental law of the universe; a ray and beam of the divine nature, which flows from, and has a necessary connection and dependence upon that eternal and immutable law, which the Almighty prescribes to his own actions. A man, who proceeds on this principle, is his own rule; for he acts in agreement with the noblest, and most valuable part of his nature: the honesty of this man is essential to, and inseparable from him, not precarious and uncertain, and owing merely to chance and occasion; for this light and law is born with, and bred in us; a piece of our frame and constitution; and from thence obtains the name of nature, and the law of nature: such a man, by consequence, will be a good man constantly, and at all times his virtue will be uniform, and every place, every emergency will find him the same; for this law of nature is perpetual, the obligation of it is lasting and inviolable; the equity and reason of it are eternal, written in large and indelible characters, no accident can deface them, no length of time waste or wear them out.—These first principles,

which are the ground of all moral inſtitutions, admit of no change, no increaſe, no abatement, no fits, no ſtarts, no ebbings and flowings.—Why then, vain man, doſt thou trouble thyſelf to ſeek abroad for ſome law or rule to mankind? What can books or maſters tell thee, which thou mighteſt not tell thyſelf? What can ſtudy or travel ſhew, which, without being at the expence of ſo much pains, thou mighteſt not ſee at home, by deſcending into thy own conſcience, and hearkening attentively to its own admonitions?

"To what purpoſe is all this labor and coſt? The toilſome tumbling over of codes and inſtitutes?—The two tables of Moſes, the twelve tables of the Greeks, the law written in the hearts of thoſe who had no law; and in ſhort, all the rules of equity and good laws, that have any where been enacted, and obtained in the world, are nothing but copies and tranſcripts produced in open court, and publiſhed from that original, which thou keepeſt cloſe within thee, and yet all the while pretendeſt to know nothing of the matter, ſtifling and ſuppreſſing as much as in thee lieth the brightneſs of that light, which ſhines within thee. As this inviſible fountain within is more exuberant and plenteous, ſo it is more lively, pure, and ſtrong, than any of the ſtreams derived from it; of which we need but this ſingle teſtimony, that when any diſputes ariſe about the right meaning of any poſitive law, the conſtant, and beſt method of underſtanding the equity and true intent of it, is by running back to its head and obſerving what is moſt agreeable to the law of nature: this is the teſt and touch, this is the level, and the truth, by which the reſt are to be judged."

And in truth all laws, whether the law of nations, or thoſe of particular countries, are only the law of nature adjuſted, and accommodated to circumſtances, nor can religion, even in relation to the worſhip of God, as it is a reaſonable ſervice, be any thing, but what neceſſarily flows from the conſideration of God, and the creatures; and this made the great Mr. Selden ſay, in an expreſſion ſomewhat homely, "that men look after religion, as the

butcher did after his knife, when he had it in his mouth."

The religion of nature is so entirely calculated for the good of human society, that though a man, hurried with the violence of his passions, breaks it himself, yet he would have all others most strictly observe it; and accordingly all legislators punish the breach of it: whereas no man rejects any positive institution himself, but is willing that all others should do so too; which plainly shews men do not apprehend it to be for the general good of mankind. And the contending parties in religion with equal confidence cry, "That if our religion be not true, God must be wanting to mankind, in what concerns their eternal happiness; he must be wanting to himself, and to his own attributes of goodness, justice and truth: it is repugnant to the very notion of a God, to let men be ignorant in a matter of such importance without any help or remedy." This reasoning, if true, necessarily infers some universal law, knowable at all times; and cannot be applied to any particular religion unknown to the world for many ages; and, as not being discoverable by reason, still unknown to the greatest part of it.

In a word, if the highest internal excellence, the greatest plainness and simplicity, unanimity, universality, antiquity, nay, eternity, can recommend a law; all these, it is owned, do, in an eminent degree, belong to the law of nature. A law, which does not depend on the uncertain meaning of words and phrases in dead languages, much less on types, metaphors allegories, parables, or on the skill or honesty of weak or designing transcribers (not to mention translators) for many ages together, but on the immutable relation of things ever visible to the whole world: and therefore Dr. Scott justly says, "Moral obligations are not founded like positive ones upon mutable circumstances (which suppose they can only oblige in certain circumstances) but upon firm and everlasting reasons; upon reasons that, to all eternity, will carry with them the same force and necessity; as long as we are creatures of an infinitely perfect

creator, it will be as much our duty, as it is now, to ſubmit our will and affections to our reaſon; and as long as we are related to other reaſonable creatures, it will be as much our duty as now, to be kind juſt, and peaceable in all our intercourſes with them: ſo that theſe are ſuch duties as no will can diſpenſe with, no reaſon abrogate, no circumſtances diſannul; but as long as God is what he is, and we are what we are, they muſt, and will oblige us."

I could, from many other conſiderations, ſhew you the abſolute perfection of natural religion: for inſtance, muſt we not, except we ſpeak without any meaning, or have no true meaning of the word *God*, intend by it a being of all perfections, free from all thoſe defects, which belong even to the moſt perfect creatures? and muſt we not have an idea of theſe perfections, before we can know whether there is any being who has enjoyed them from eternity; and muſt we not know there is ſuch a being from our reaſon before we can come to this queſtion, whether he has made any external revelation? Nay, examining into this queſtion would be to very little purpoſe, except we could know whether this being is bound by his external word; and had not, either at the time of giving it, a ſecret will inconſiſtent with his revealed will; or has not ſince changed his will? This cannot be known from any external revelation, though it expreſſed itſelf ever ſo plainly; becauſe the queſtion being, whether God is obliged to do as he in it ſays he will do? This muſt be reſolved antecedently by the light of nature, which muſt diſcover to us the veracity of God, and the immutability of his will; and the ſame reaſons which will prove he could not change his will ſince he made an external revelation, will prove his will was always unchangeable, and at all times the ſame; whether internally or externally revealed: Nor could we take a ſtep towards proving the veracity of God, or the immutability of his will; or indeed, any of his perfections beſides power, without knowing that the will of God

is always determined by the nature and reaſon of things: otherwiſe falſehood and mutability might be the will of God, and there could be no ſuch thing in nature as good and evil, but an arbitrary will would govern all things.

Were we not capable by our reaſon of diſtinguiſhing good from evil, or knowing from the conſideration of the invariable perfections of God, what the divine goodneſs could command, or forbid his creatures antecedently to any external revelation, we could not diſtinguiſh the true inſtituted religion from the many falſe ones: or if by accident we ſtumbled on it, avoid running into many abſurdities in the interpretation of it, through the difficulties that muſt attend a book written in a dead language, and ſo many ages ſince; and where, through the vaſt variety of readings, we might miſtake the true reading; and though we were certain of the letter, even the letter killeth.*

If man had not natural abilities to diſtinguiſh between good and evil, or to know what is pleaſing or diſpleaſing to God, how could we ſay he was a moral agent, or even an accountable creature?

Did we not allow that men, by the light of nature, are capable of forming a ſound judgment in matters of religion, they may be ſo impoſed on by controverted, or miſ-interpreted, not to ſay forged texts, as to admit of ſeveral objects of divine worſhip in their practice, while in their words they own but one; or, in order to advance a ſupernatural charity, deſtroy all natural humanity; and believe our love to God may be beſt ſhewn by our hatred to our fellow creatures; and introduce ſuch abominable notions, as may make religion, inſtead of a benefit, become a miſchief to mankind.

Whereas, if we allow the light of nature ſufficient to enable us to judge rightly in theſe matters, and conſequently to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood; we muſt own, ſince there can be no diſagreement in truth, that there is an exact conformity between internal and external revelation; with no other difference but as to the

* 2 Cor. 3. 6.

manner of their being revealed ; or in other words, that the goſpel, ſince it is impoſſible for men at the ſame time to be under different obligations, cannot command thoſe things which the law of nature forbids : or forbid what that commands ; nor can any thing be a part of religion by one law, which by the other is ſuperſtition ; nor can external revelation make that the will of God, which the light of nature continually repreſents as unworthy of having God for its author.

The judicious writer of the rational catechiſm, lately reprinted ſays, "That one of the moſt univerſal cauſes of the great differences among men in matters of religion, is, that they have not examined things to the bottom ; they have failed in their foundation-work ; they have too much ſlighted that philoſophy which is the natural religion of all men ; and which being natural, muſt needs be univerſal and eternal ;—they have forſaken the rule of right reaſon, which only is capable to produce true ſymmetry in their intellectual buildings ; and they have applied themſelves without any rule to the interpretation of words and phraſes, which being eaſily ſuſceptable of various ſenſes, have produced as many deformed irregularities."

Though all parties alike pretend to aim at truth, yet none of them, I think, inform us what truth is, or wherein it conſiſts : now if truth in general, implies an agreement of our ideas with the things themſelves, religious truth, or true religion muſt conſiſt in the agreement of our ideas with thoſe things, which are the ſubjects of our religious enquiry ; *viz.* the nature of God and man : and falſe religion muſt conſiſt in having ideas that are not agreeable to, or do not truly repreſent thoſe ſubjects ; and this agreement which we call truth in reſpect to theory, is what we term, in relation to action, fit, juſt, good or reaſonable. Thus God is frequently ſtiled in ſcripture the God of truth, becauſe his ideas of things, and the things themſelves exactly correſpond ; and all his actions are agreeable to the relation things have to one another : and when our

Men have a correct knowledge of the law of nature, then they must have perfect knowledge of God. Many of the Heathen Philosophers

actions are such, we do all that is fit, just and reasonable, all that God or man can require; and from hence too it follows, that iniquity is the same in action, as falsity is in theory.

CHAP. IV.

That natural and revealed religion having the same end, their precepts must be the same.

B. ALLOWING that the natural knowledge we have of God, ourselves, and our fellow-creatures, is the foundation of all religion, may not external revelation, building on this foundation, erect a larger and more noble edifice, by extending it to such things as the light of nature could not reach, without contradicting any thing it teaches?

A. I thought I had obviated this objection, by proving that the religion of nature was so perfect, that nothing could be added to it; and that the truth of all revelation was to be judged of by its agreement with it: however, since this objection is the most plausible of any that you have yet made; I reply, that if our natural notions of the divine perfections demonstrate, that God will require nothing of his creatures but what tends to their good, whatsoever is of this kind, is a superstructure that belongs to the law of nature; or, in other words, what the reason, or the nature of the things themselves plainly point out to us; and for all other matters, which have no such tendency, you must seek another foundation, another nature very different from the divine, to build *your hay and stubble upon.* And,

If it be evident from the light of nature, what are those relations we stand in to God and our fellow

creatures ; and that neither God nor man, without acting tyrannically, can require more than thoſe require, can external revelation any more than internal exceed theſe bonds ?

If original religion comprehends every thing obligatory on the account of its excellency ; that is, every thing which tends to the honor of God, or the good of man ; and theſe are the only ends of traditional religion ; no arbitrary, or merely poſitive precepts, as not tending to the honor of God, or the good of man, can belong either to natural or revealed religion.

By the law of nature, as well as the goſpel, the honor of God, and the good of man, being the two grand, or general commandments, all particular precepts muſt be comprehended under theſe two, and belong alike to the law of nature as well as the goſpel ; and what does not, can belong to neither. Thus any particular precept, if by change of circumſtances it ceaſes to contribute to the honour of God, or the good of man, much more if it become prejudiced to either, muſt loſe its obliging force.

There muſt be ſome rule, or rules, which bind without exception ; becauſe every exception to a rule is built on ſome rule or other ; and as there cannot be rules, ſo there cannot be exceptions *ad infinitum* : and I ſuppoſe you will not deny, but that theſe two grand rules, or commandments, the honor of God, and the good of man, are obligatory without exception. And yet theſe would be to little purpoſe, could not reaſon tell men how to apply them in all conditions and circumſtances of life.

B. Suppoſing no particular precepts can oblige, if they chance to claſh with either of thoſe commandments, yet what is to be done if theſe two interfere with one another ; muſt the good of man, or the honor of God, take place ?

A. Theſe two grand laws are in effect the ſame, ſince what promotes the honor of God, neceſſarily promotes the good of man ; the more we love and honor God, the

more we ſhall imitate him in our extenſive love to our fellow-creatures, who are equally the children of God. The greater our veneration is for our maker, the more it will excite us to copy thoſe perfections of goodneſs and benevolence we adore in him; ſo that the duty of a truly religious perſon, and of a good ſubject and citizen are the ſame with relation to God and man; for the more he honors God, the more zealous will he be to act the patriot; and the more he does that, the more he honors God; becauſe the happier men are, the more reaſon they have to honor that God who made them ſo. The way to *glorify your father which is in heaven*, is to *let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works.** And *herein is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*† And indeed, nothing can be plainer from ſcripture, than that theſe two great duties of the love of God and our neighbor, include each other. *If* ſays the apoſtle, *a man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.*‡ And, *if we love one another, God dwelleth in us; and the love of God is perfected in us.*§ Again, *let us love one another; every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loves not, knoweth not God.*‖ *But whoſo hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* ¶ And it was this conſideration, that made that great emperor and philoſopher Marcus Antonius ſay, "Thou wilt never do any thing purely human in a right manner, unleſs thou knoweſt the relation it bears to things divine; nor any thing divine, unleſs thou knoweſt all the ties it has to things human."

In a word, as man is by nature qualified to anſwer all the purpoſes of a ſocial life, and to act a part agreeable to reaſon, ſo in doing this he gives glory to his maker, by fulfilling the end of his creation; but if he goes contrary to the light of nature, in acting an unſociable and hurtful part, he reflects diſhonor on his creator, by defeating, as far as in him lies, the deſign of God, in making him a ſocial creature. But,

* Mat. 5. 16. † John. 15. 8. ‡ 1 John 4. 20. § Ib. 12. ‖ Ib. 7. 8. ¶ John 3 17.

Becauſe bigots repreſent theſe two grand obligations as frequently claſhing; and oppoſe things which are for the good of man, on pretence that the honor of God will either directly or indirectly ſuffer by it; and on this pretence have frequently done ſuch miſchiefs to their fellow-creatures, as to give occaſion to that proverbial ſaying, *In nomine Domini incipit omne malum*: give me leave to ſay, that we can no otherwiſe honor God, ſince that conſiſts in having the moſt exalted ideas of him, than by ſuppoſing him benevolent in the moſt univerſal and impartial manner; and conſequently, to imagine he can command any thing inconſiſtent with this univerſal benevolence, is highly to diſhonor him; it is to deſtroy his impartial goodneſs, and make his power and wiſdom degenerate into cruelty and craft.

Though we have received our all from God, we can give him nothing, nor do him the leaſt kindneſs, much leſs return kindneſs for kindneſs; and therefore, the only way we have to ſhew our real gratitude to our great creator and benefactor, is to be as uſeful as we can to his creatures, whom we ought to love as ourſelves, and if there can now be a ſin againſt the holy ghoſt, I ſhould not ſcruple to ſay, it is making religion the means of deſtroying the end of all religion, and rendering the creature miſerable, on pretence of doing honor to the creator; who, as he has impreſſed on bodies, in order to preſerve the natural word, a tendency to each other, ſo he has implanted in minds, the better to ſupport the moral world, a tendency to be kind and beneficent to one another. And ſo deep is the impreſſion of benevolence, that we cannot but applaud the perſon who does brave and generous actions, even though we ſuffer by them; and as much condemn him who acts baſely and treacherouſly, though we are ever ſo great gainers.

"Is there then *(ſays a noble author)* a natural beauty of figures; and is there not as natural one of actions? No ſooner the eye opens upon figures, the ear to ſounds, than ſtraight the beautiful reſults, and grace and harmony are known and acknowledged. No ſooner are ac-

tions viewed, no sooner the human affections and passions discerned (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than straight an inward eye distinguishes, the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable apart from the deformed, the foul, the odious or the despicable." How is it possible therefore not to own, "That as the distinctions have their foundation in nature, the discernment itself is natural, and from nature alone."

B. This, I own, is a beautiful description of human nature, and a strong evidence of the goodness of its author; but do men act as if they had such an innate love for nature, or such a benevolent disposition?

A. An execrable superstition has in many christian countries, in a manner, extinguished these kind sentiments, and even all humanity and pity; insomuch that the tender sex can rejoice to hear the shrieks, and see the agonies of men expiring under the most cruel torments; and there is scarce any place, so much does this cursed bigotry prevail, where we do not almost daily see too much reason to cry,

Tantum religio, potuit, suadere malorum.

The noble author now quoted justly observes, "If there be a religion that teaches the adoration and love of a God, whose character is to be captious, and of high resentment, subject to wrath and anger, furious, revengeful, and revenging himself, when offended, on others than those who gave the offence; and if there be added to the character of this God, a fraudulent disposition, encouraging deceit and treachery among men; favorable to a few, though for slight causes, and cruel to the rest; it is evident that such a religion as this, being strongly enforc'd, must of necessity raise even an approbation and respect towards the vices of this kind, and breed a suitable disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, and deceitful temper. For even irregularities and enormities of a heinous kind must in many cases appear illustrious to one, who considers them in a being

admired and contemplated with the higheſt honour and veneration.—Whenſoever, therefore, a religion teaches the love and admiration of a deity, that has any apparent character of ill; it teaches, at the ſame time, a love and and admiration of that ill, and cauſes that to be taken for good and amiable, which is in itſelf horrid and deteſtable."

Archbiſhop Tillotſon, than whom none better underſtood human nature, ſays, that "according as men's notions of God are, ſuch will their religion be. If they have groſs and falſe conceptions of God, their religion will be abſurd and ſuperſtitious: if men fancy God to be an ill-natured being, armed with infinite power, who takes delight in the miſery and ruin of his creatures, and is ready to take all advantages againſt them, they may fear him, but they will hate him; and they will be apt to be ſuch towards one another, as they fancy God to be towards them: for all religion doth naturally incline men to imitate him whom they worſhip."

Dr. Scott, to root out all ſuch injurious notions as derogate from the goodneſs of God, very juſtly obſerves, that "God, being infinitely good in his own nature, it is impoſſible we ſhould conceive him to be better than he is; and therefore every falſe notion we entertain of his goodneſs muſt detract from it; and ſo much as we detract from his goodneſs, ſo much we detract from the principal reaſon and motive of our loving him."

And indeed power and knowledge of themſelves, cannot engage our love; if they could, we ſhould love the devil in proportion to his power and knowledge: it is goodneſs alone which can beget confidence, love and veneration; and there is none of thoſe queſtions, whether relating to God or man, but may be eaſily determined, by conſidering which ſide of the queſtion carries with it the greateſt goodneſs; ſince the ſame light of nature, which ſhews us there is ſuch a good being, ſhews us alſo what ſuch goodneſs expects. And did men conſider how repugnant it is to his goodneſs, to require

any thing of them which they had no reason to obey, but because they had no power to disobey; they must abhor the notion of all arbitrary commands.

And therefore I shall not scruple to affirm, that he who stedfastly adheres to what the light of nature teaches him concerning the divine goodness, as he will avoid the comfortless prospect of the atheist, the perpetual anxiety of the superstitious, the wild perturbation of the enthusiast, and the pernicious fury of the bigot; so he cannot fail of the true religion, happily seated in the middle between these extremes. And, as such a person cannot but love God as he ought; so, in imitation of the divine goodness, which influences all his actions, he will contribute his utmost to the good of others; and his love and kindness will be extensive as human nature; and going on rational and evident principles, which must give him entire satisfaction, he will act a steady uniform part. And what can be wanting to a man who has this heavenly, this god-like disposition, which renders him happy in himself, and, as far as it is in his power, makes the whole world so too;

And since it is not easy to part with a subject which one can scarce think of without rapture; I must say, that men can never have true sentiments of the goodness of the divine legislator, or esteem his laws as they ought, till they are convinced he requires nothing of them but what is for their good; and they cannot but be miserable as long as they swerve from rules so essential to their happiness; and that the longer they do so, the more difficult it will be to acquire a contrary habit. These notions, early inculcated, will cause men with joy to obey the divine laws, and make them in reality love God, as well as be beloved by him; who has the chief regard to the heart, and above all things requires the purity of the mind; and that men should act, not out of a principle of slavish fear, but from perfect love, void of all fear.

Plutarch speaking of religion, as it stood in the heathen church, and in his own time, represents it as full

of ſatisfaction, hope and delight; and ſays, "it is plain and evident from moſt demonſtrable teſtimonies, that neither the ſocieties, nor public meetings in the temples, nor any other diverting parties, fights or entertainments, are more delightful, or rejoicing, than what we ourſelves behold, and practice in the church worſhip.—Our diſpoſition and temper is not, on this occaſion, as if we were in the preſence of worldly potentates, dread ſovereigns, and deſpotic princes; nor are we here found meanly humbling ourſelves, crouching in fear and awe and full of anxiety and confuſion, as would be natural to us in ſuch a caſe; but where the divinity is eſteemed the neareſt, and moſt immediately preſent, there horrors and amazement are the furtheſt baniſhed; there the heart, we find, gives the freeſt way to pleaſure, to entertainment—and this even to exceſs." And,

Chriſtians in addreſſing to the divine majeſty, muſt be filled with inexpreſſible joy and delight, did they conſider the true notion of God; "Who, as archbiſhop Tillotſon ſays, would appear to be ſo lovely a being, ſo full of goodneſs and all deſirable prefections, that even thoſe who are of ſo irregular underſtanding, as not to belive there is a God, yet could not refrain from wiſhing with all their hearts there was one,—Who takes particular care of every one of us, and loves us, and delights to do us good—Who underſtands all our wants, and is able and willing to relieve us in our greateſt ſtraits. Is it not every man's intereſt, that there ſhould be ſuch a governor of the world as really deſigns our happineſs, and has omitted nothing neceſſary to it? as governs us for our advantage, and will require nothing of us but what is for our good, and yet will infinitely reward us for doing of that which is beſt for ourſelves; that will puniſh any man that ſhall go about to injure us, or to deal otherwiſe with us, than himſelf, in like caſes, would be dealt withal? We have reaſon to believe God to be ſuch a being, if he be at all."

B. Are not the laſt words too bold, in ſuppoſing

there could be no God, were he not such as he describes him?

A. With submission, I think not; since there can be nothing in God, but what is God-like; he either must be perfectly good, or not be at all. It would be well, if all who in words give this character of the deity, were consistent with themselves, and did not impute such actions to him, as make him resemble the worst of beings, and so run into downright demonism. And let me add, men of good sense, and who mean well, will naturally fall into the same sentiments; a Shaftsbury will say the same as a Tillotson.

"If there be" says that noble author "a general mind; it can have no particular interest; but the general good, and the good of the whole, and its own private good, must of necessity be one and the same. It can intend nothing besides, nor aim at any thing beyond, nor be provoked to any thing contrary. So that we have only to consider, whether there be really such a thing as a mind that has relation to the whole, or not. For, if unhappily there be no mind; we may comfort ourselves, however, that nature has no malice: If there be really a mind, we may rest satisfied, that it is the best natured one in the world. The last case, one would imagine, should be most comfortable; and the notion of a common parent less frightful than that of forlorn nature, and a fatherless world. Though, as religion stands amongst us, there are many good people who would have less fear in being thus exposed; and would be easier, perhaps, in their minds, if they were assured they had only mere chance to trust to. For no body trembles to think there should be no God; but rather, that there should be one. This, however, would be otherwise, if Deity were thought as kindly of as humanity; and we could be persuaded to believe, that if there really was a God, the highest goodness must of necessity belong to him, without any of those defects of passion, those meannesses and imperfections which we acknowledge such in ourselves; which as good men, we endeavor all

we can to be ſuperior to, and which, we find, we every day conquer as we grow better."

In recapitulating what I have ſaid of the agreement of natural and revealed religion. I cannot do it more fully than in the words of Dr. Sherlock (now biſhop of Bangor)who in a ſermon for propagating the goſpel (where we may expect every thing which recommends it) ſays, that "The religion of the goſpel is the true original religion of reaſon and nature.—That the doctrine of repentance, with which the goſpel ſet out in the world, had reference to the law of reaſon and nature, againſt which men had every where offended: And ſince repentance infers the neceſſity of a future reformation, and a return to that duty and obedience, from which, by tranſgreſſion, we are fallen; the conſequence is manifeſtly this, that the goſpel was a republication of the law of nature, and its precepts declarative of that original religion, which was as old as the creation.

"This," continues he, "will appear, by conſidering the nature of the thing itſelf. The notions of good and evil are eternally and unalterably the ſame; which notions are the rules and meaſures of all moral actions, and are conſequently neceſſary, and conſtitute parts of religion. And therefore, if the religion of nature, in her primitive ſtate, was pure and uncorrupt, which will not, I preſume, be denied, though there was ſufficient reaſon for a republication of it. becauſe of the great ignorance and ſuperſtition which had grown upon the world; yet there could be no reaſon for any alteration of it: For though the world was the worſe for abuſing the religion of nature, and might want to be reformed by a divine inſtitution; yet the religion of nature was not the worſe for being abuſed, but ſtill retained its firſt purity and ſimplicity. The duties of religion, conſidered as the rules of action, flow from the relation we bear to God, and to one another; and religion muſt ever be the ſame, as long as theſe relations continue unaltered. If our firſt parent was the creature of God, ſo are we; and whatever ſervice and duty he owed in vir-

tue of this dependance, the ſame is due from us; nor can this relation be ever made the ground of different duties in his caſe and ours. If therefore nature rightly inſtructed him at firſt how to ſerve his maker; our obligations being the ſame with his, our rule muſt be the ſame alſo. The caſe is the ſame with reſpect to the duties owing from man to man. And it would be as reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the three angles of a triangle ſhould be equal to two right ones in one age, and unequal in another, as to ſuppoſe, that the duties of religion ſhould differ in one age from what they were in another; the habitudes and relations from which they flow continuing always the ſame.

"That the caſe is in fact what I have repreſented it to be, might be ſhewn from the particular laws of the goſpel, and their dependance on the maxims and principles of natural religion. —I will content myſelf with one general proof, which reaches to every part of the Chriſtian doctrine.—If the law and the prophets hang on theſe two great commandments, viz. The love of God, and the love of our neighbor; then the doctrine of our ſaviour, which is the perfection of the law and the prophets, muſt hang on them likewiſe. Now, if you will allow, that the love of God, and the love of our neighbor, are fundamentals in the law of reaſon and nature (as undoubtedly they are) you muſt alſo allow, that whatever may be deduced from them by rational conſequence, muſt be a precept of the law of nature: Whatever therefore hangs on theſe two commandments, muſt neceſſarily be a part of natural religion; and that all the law and the prophets do ſo hang, and conſequently the doctrine of the goſpel, which is the perfection of them, you have had our ſaviour's expreſs teſtimony. Since then it appears (as I think) that the religion of the goſpel is the true original religion of reaſon and nature;———That it has, as ſuch, a claim to be received independent of thoſe miracles which were wrought for its confirmation; will be admitted by all who allow the force and obligation of natural reli-

gion; and can be denied by none who know or understand themſelves. The principles of religion are interwoven with the very frame and make of our minds, and we may as well run from ourſelves, as from the ſenſe of the obligations we are under."

B. But does not this right reverend prelate in this ſermon affirm, that there are doctrines in Chriſtianity, which, though not different, yet are diſtinct from the principles of reaſon and nature?

A. There is nothing more common with learned authors, than diſtinctions without any difference; yet the biſhop very cautiouſly words what he ſays, "That the doctrines of Chriſtianity, though not different, are diſtinct from the principles of reaſon and nature:" but he does not ſay they are diſtinct from thoſe doctrines which flow from the principles of reaſon and nature. And what he immediately adds, that "Our ſaviour came into the world to ſupply the defects, not of religion, which continued in its purity and perfection, but of nature," plainly ſhews, that he thinks nothing could be added by our ſaviour to a law that had no defects; and the defects of nature could only be ſupplied by obliging people to live up to this natural law of unchangeable purity and perfection.

This is doing juſtice to revealed as well as natural religion, and ſhews the author of both to be at all times equally wiſe, good and beneficient; and the biſhop ought to be valued for ſpeaking thus plainly: *O ſi ſic omnia dixiſſet!*

And to this right reverend father, I may add the authority of the late moſt reverend archbiſhop Sharp, who ſays, "That religion (taking that word as it ſignifies that univerſal duty we owe to God, and by which we are to recommend ourſelves to his favor) is not ſo variable, uncertain and arbitrary a matter, as ſome men do perhaps ſuppoſe it; but is a conſtant, fixed, permanent, immutable thing. The ſame now that it was in the days of the old law; and the ſame then that it was in the days before the law was given; and the ſame both then and

now that it ſhall be a thouſand years hence, if the world ſhould laſt ſo long. True religion, and that which is from God, was, and is, and ever will be the ſame in ſubſtance in all countries, and in all nations, and among all ſorts and conditions of men whatſoever; and the ſum of it is, *To love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our minds, and with all our ſtrength; and* next to that, *to love our neighbor as ourſelves.* This was the religion that the patriarchs, and all the pious men of old lived in, and by which they obtained the favor and acceptance of God; when as yet there was no revealed inſtituted religion in the world.—That this is the ſum of the chriſtian religion, no man can in the leaſt doubt, that has ever read the new teſtament. In our ſaviour's inſtitution there is hardly any one thing recommended to us, that doth not directly relate to this matter; that is not either an inſtance wherein we are to expreſs our love to God, and our neighbor; or a means whereby we may be furthered in the practiſing of thoſe duties; or an argument, and motive, and encouragement to excite us to the practiſing of them. It is the deſign of all his doctrines, to give us right notions of God, and our neighbor; to teach us how excellent, how good God is in himſelf, and how kind, how gracious to us; and therefore what infinite reaſon we have to love and ſerve all mankind (who are our neighbours) for his ſake.

"We have an eaſy, and a true notion of that religion which is from God; and we can never be at a loſs to find out in what it doth conſiſt. It is not a thing to be alter'd at pleaſure; both the law of nature, and the law of God; both the natural diſpenſation under which all men are born, and the reveal'd Diſpenſation as we have either in the Old or New Teſtament; do ſufficiently inſtruct us in the main heads of it. Nay I dare be bold to ſay, ſo long as mankind do retain their nature, and are not transformed into another ſort of creatures than what God made them at firſt; it is impoſſible that

there ſhould be any true religion, but what may be ſummed up in theſe two things; to love God, and our neighbor."

CHAP. VI.

That the not adhering to thoſe notions reaſon dictates concering the nature of God, has been the occaſion of all ſuperſtition, and all thoſe innumerable miſchiefs, that mankind, on account of religion, have done either to themſelves, or one another.

HAVING in general ſhewn the abſurdity of not being governed by the reaſon of things in all matters of religion, I ſhall now in particular, ſhew the fatal conſequences of not adhering to thoſe notions reaſon dictates concerning the nature of God.

Charron, tho' a prieſt of that church which abounds with ſuperſtition, the moſt pernicious as well as abſurd, ſeems to have a right notion of ſuperſtition as well as juſtly to abhor it, in ſaying, that "ſuperſtition, and moſt other errors and defects in religion, are, generally ſpeaking, owing chiefly to want of becoming and right apprehenſions of God: we debaſe and bring him down to us; we compare, and judge him by ourſelves; we cloath him with our infirmities, and then proportion and fit our fancy accordingly.—What horrid prophanation and blaſphemy is this!"

It is to this abſurdity of debaſing God, and cloathing him with our infirmities, and judging of him by ourſelves, that the mediatory Gods amongſt the heathen owe their riſe. Had they believed a ſupreme being was every where, and at all times knew their thoughts, they could never have taken ſuch a round-about way of addreſſing him; who not only knew what they deſired, but their

real wants, and what would relieve them, better than any mediatory beings whatever.

B. They addreſſed to mediatory beings, to ſhew their greater reſpect to the ſupreme being, and their own unworthineſs to approach him.

A. This ſhews what unworthy notions they had of the ſupreme being; ſince it would be an affront even to a temporal prince, if he was preſent, and heard every thing you ſaid, not to addreſs to him, but to another, to let the prince know what you wanted from him.

The heathen muſt think, if they thought at all, that thoſe mediatory Gods could either ſuggeſt to the ſupreme God ſome reaſons he was before ignorant of; or that by their importunities they could prevail on his weakneſs, to do what otherwiſe he was not willing to do.

This heathen notion, as it ſuppoſed the ſupreme God either ignorant or weak; ſo it made the mediatory Gods to have a greater kindneſs for, and readineſs to do good to mankind; and that their ſolicitations made him better natured than otherwiſe he would be; this of courſe took off their love from the ſupreme, and placed it on thoſe mediatory Gods, upon whoſe powerful interceſſions they ſo much depended. However, theſe heathens, allowing one, and but one moſt high God, did not ſo far derogate from the honor of the one true God, as to pretend that the moſt diſtinguiſhed among their ſeveral mediators was equal to him; equality and mediation being as inconſiſtent as equality and ſupremacy; and they would have made their religion an arrant jumble, if they had worſhipped theſe Gods ſometimes as mediators only, ſometimes as ſovereign diſpoſers of things; and ſometimes as both together.

Had the heathen believed God to have been a purely-ſpiritual, inviſible being, they could never have ſuppoſed him viſible to mortals, or have thought that an unlimited being could appear under the limited form of a man, or other animal; or that an omnipre-

ſent being could any more be preſent in one place, or creature, than another; or that ſuch a being could be confined to a ſmall ſpot of earth, while another equally omnipreſent was in heaven, and a third deſcending from thence, &c. Or that one God could be ſent on the errand of another God, after the manner that God Mercury was by God Jupiter; though there was nothing too abſurd for the heathen to believe, after they had deſtroyed the unity of God; except it was, that Jupiter and Mercury, the ſender and the ſent, were the ſame God.

The primitive fathers bitterly inveighed againſt theſe heatheniſh notions: Juſtin Martyr, for inſtance, ſays, "None, who have the leaſt ſenſe, will dare to affirm, that the maker and father of the univerſe did appear in a ſmall ſpot of the earth; the God of the univerſe can neither aſcend, nor deſcend, nor come into any place." Tertullian ſays, "he would not believe the ſovereign God deſcended into he womb of a woman, though even the ſcripture itſelf ſhould ſay it." "It is impoſſible," ſays Euſebius, "that the eyes of mortals ſhould ever ſee the ſupreme God; *viz.* Him, who is above all things, and whoſe eſſence is unbegotten and immutable." Again, "it is abſurd, and contrary to all reaſon, that the unbegotten and immutable nature of the almighty God ſhould take the form of a man; or that the ſcripture ſhould forge ſuch-like falſities." Minutius Felix in his apology ſays, that "the deity cannot die, nor can any thing which is born be a God: that only is divine, which has neither beginning nor end; if the Gods get children, they would get them immortal: we muſt conclude thoſe Gods to be men, of whoſe birth and burial we are fully ſatisfied." Thus the fathers expoſed the pagan polytheiſm.

A great deal more, as you may well imagine, might be ſaid on this head; but now I ſhall briefly conſider what pernicious effects the having wrong and unnatural conceptions of the deity, has occaſioned among men with relation to themſelves, and one another.

If we take a general view of thoſe miſchiefs mankind have at all times practiſed on a religious account, either upon themſelves or others; we ſhall find them owing to their entertaining ſuch notions of God, as are entirely inconſiſtent with his nature; and contrary to what their reaſon, if attended to, would inform them of the deſign and end of the laws of God.

Had not numbers in all ages thought, that God delighted in the pain and miſery of his creatures; they could never have imagined, that the beſt way to render them acceptable to him, was by tormenting themſelves, with immoderate watchings, faſtings, penances, and mortifications of all ſorts; and the greater the more pleaſing: and even at preſent there are among chriſtians, mahometans, and pagans, numbers of men who devote themſelves to exerciſes full of pain and corporal ſufferings, and either wound or mangle their own perſons, or find other ways of tormenting themſelves; and indeed, the ſuperſtitious every where think, the leſs mercy they ſhew to their bodies, the more mercy God will ſhew to their ſouls.

Many of the primitive chriſtians, inſtead of flying, as the goſpel directs, not only ran voluntarily to execution, but provoked their judges to do them that favor. And under Trajan, all the chriſtians in a city in Aſia came in a body to the proconſul, and offered themſelves to the ſlaughter, which made him cry, O! ye unhappy people, if ye have a mind to die, have ye not halters and precipices enough to end your lives; but ye muſt come here for executioners? And this was a general practice under the *Antonini*; and Marcus Antonius ſeverely reflects on the obſtinacy of the chriſtians, in thus running headlong to death. And St. Cyprian labors to comfort thoſe who might be ſo unhappy, by the ceaſing of the then perſecution, to miſs the crown of martyrdom; though one would think there were but few who wanted this conſolation; ſince he ſays, many of the clergy, and the far greater part of the laity apoſtatized. But when by the empire's

becoming chriſtian, the crown of martyrdom was no longer to be obtained by the prevailing party of chriſtians, then exerciſing cruelties on themſelves was eſteemed the next beſt thing; and many devotees put monſtrous hardſhips on themſelves, while others choſe poverty, rags, and naſtineſs, or elſe retired to caves, deſarts, and other ſolitary places, to ſigh away their miſerable lives; and eccleſiaſtical hiſtory is full of miracles done by ſuch madmen as Simeon Stylites, who had no other dwelling than a pillar, on which he ſpent the beſt part of his life; and it was owing to theſe ſuperſtitious notions that ſuch numbers of monaſteries and nunneries were ſoon founded, to the great oppreſſion and depopulation of the chriſtan world; not but that the impudent forgeries of Athanaſius, and other ſuch-like ſaints about miracles done by monks helped to increaſe this ſuperſtition; whilſt the prelates, tho' they encouraged thoſe ſeverities on others, were far from practiſing any on themſelves.

Had ſuch notions been adhered to concerning the divine goodneſs, as the light of nature dictates, the Egyptians, and ſome other pagan nations could never have thought that cutting off the foreſkin (not to be performed without great pain and hazard) could have been eſteemed a religious duty, acceptable to a good and gracious God, who makes nothing in vain, much leſs what requires the cutting off, even with extreme danger as well as anguiſh. Had nature required ſuch an operation, nature, being always the ſame, would ſtill have required it.

This inſtitution, as is proved by Marſham and others, ſeems to be owing to the Egyptians, who thought all to be prophane who uſed it not; and it was after Abraham had been in Egypt, that circumciſion was inſtituted, in order, it is likely, to recommend his poſterity to the Egyptians, on whom they were for ſome ages to depend. And what makes this the more probable, is, that it was not till after the Lord had ordered Moſes into Egypt, that the Lord met him by the way in the inn, and ſought

to kill him,* for not circumcising his son: and upon Joshua's circumcising the Israelites (circumcision not being observed during their stay in the wilderness, when they had no communication with Egypt) the Lord himself says, this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.†

The heathen world must have very gross conceptions not only of their inferior Gods, but of the father of Gods and men; when they imagine him of so cruel a nature as to be delighted butchering of innocent animals; and that the stench of burnt flesh should be a sweet smelling savour in his nostrils, as to attone for the wickedness of men; and wicked, no doubt, they were, when they had such an attonement at hand. So that the harmless were burnt to save the hurtful; and men the less innocent they grew, the more they destroyed the innocent beasts.

Non bove mactato cœlestia numina guadent;
Sed, quæ præstanda est, & sine Teste, Fide.
Ovid. Epist. p. 89. Ep. 20. v. 181.

If the Pagans believed beasts were not given them for food, why did they eat them? Or if they thought they were, why did they ungratefully throw back the gifts of God on the donor? Or, why did they not drown, or bury them, rather than make such a stench in burning them, as many times, by the number of sacrifices, might infect the very air?

It is probable, that the heathen priests who shared with their Gods, and reserved the best bits for themselves, had the chief hand in this as well as in all other gainful superstitions; while the deluded people, who many times suffered by the scarcity of provisions, caused by the great number of sacrifices, were at vast expence in maintaining these holy butchers, whose very trade inspired them with cruelty.

* Exodus 4. 24. † Joshua 5. 2--9.

And it is probable, this abſurd notion prevailed like all other abſurdities by degrees, and at firſt ſacrifices were only religious feaſts, either in commemoration of ſome national benefit; where after God, their great benefactor, was celebrated, they commemorated their particular benefactors; or elſe feaſts were made on a private account by the maſter of the family, upon ſhearing his ſheep, gathering in the fruits of the earth, &c. where thoſe that aſſiſted him were entertained, and joyfully joined in giving thanks to the author of thoſe bleſſings, without deſtroying, or burning any part of the creature given for their uſe; and the maſter of the family was no doubt, maſter of the ceremonies at his own feaſt. But this ſimple method not pleaſing certain perſons, who were reſolved to have the beſt ſhare in all thoſe religious feaſts, they perſuaded the people that it was neceſſary ſome part of the fleſh of animals was to be burnt to feed the hungary noſtrils of the Deity, delighted with the ſweet ſavour of burnt fleſh; and the better part to be reſerved unburnt for themſelves, to whom the ſlaying of the animals, and the offering them up was appropriated. It is then no wonder the number of the Gods multiplied, ſince the more Gods the more ſacrifices, and the prieſts had better fare; and that they might not want plentiful feaſtings, the people were made to believe, that they could learn their fortunes from the intrails of the beaſts they ſacrificed; and this method continues to this day in thoſe places, where they have not found out an eaſier and better way of cheating the people.

B. You ſeem to be of the ſentiments of the poet, who ſays,

Natural religion were eaſy firſt, and plain;
Tales made it myſtery, offerings made it gain:
Sacrifices and ſhews were at length prepar'd,
The prieſts eat roaſt-meat, and the people ſtar'd.

The Pagans ſacrificing of beaſts was not ſo bad in it-

ſelf, as what it ſoon occaſioned, human ſacrifices; which men, being of greater value than beaſts, were believed to be more acceptable; and parents, ſtifling all natural affections, offered up their own children, as the moſt precious gifts they could beſtow on the God; except offering up their own lives, and ſacrificing themſelves: And as this ſacrifice was thought moſt meritorious, ſo the more excellent the perſons, the more agreeable the ſacrifice; and there are even at this day, a number of ſuperſtitious people in India, who out of great devotion throw themſelves under the wheels of thoſe heavy chariots, which carry the images of their Gods, and are cruſhed to death; and others, out of the ſame miſtaken zeal, cut of their fleſh, and mangle their limbs till they fall down dead: which makes the people rejoice at their ſufferings, and reverence them as moſt holy martyrs; concluding that nothing but the truth of their religion could enable them to ſhew ſuch terrible marks of zeal on themſelves, and become voluntary martyrs.

B. I pity thoſe deluded people, and wonder how men can perſuade themſelves, that the mercy of heaven can be purchaſed by ſuch barbarities, as human nature left to itſelf would ſtart at.

A. That the prieſts were every where for human ſacrifices, is no wonder; ſince they had the appointing the men, whom the Gods did the great honor to accept for burnt-offerings: and indeed, after people once gave themſelves up to believe in their prieſts, there was nothing too abſurd to be received as divine. When the Ethiopians, for inſtance, were once perſuaded that their prieſts were intimately acquainted with the will of the Gods, it was too late to diſpute any orders they pretended to bring from them; and therefore, their kings, as well as private perſons, well knowing that the commands of the immortal Gods were not to be diſputed by mortals, moſt religiouſly executed themſelves as ſoon as the pleaſure of the Gods were ſignified to them by thoſe ſacred meſſengers of their will; and this blind devotion

might have continued till now, had not an infidel prince, bred up in the prophane philoſophy of the Greeks, put a ſtop to it by ſurpriſing, and deſtroying at once all thoſe holy impoſtors.

We learn from Bernier and others, that it has been an immemorial cuſtom in Indoſtan, for the women (ſo great a power has ſuperſtition even over that fearful ſex) to burn themſelves with their dead huſbands, adorned with all the incombuſtible riches they could procure on their own account, or that the folly of others would ſend by them to their dead friends: Theſe their prieſts ſecure to themſelves by telling the credulous people that the aſhes of the dead, and all burnt with them, are too ſacred to be touched by any but themſelves.

B. Though human ſacrifices obtained among the heathen, yet ſure the Levitical law did not approve, or countenance any ſuch practices.

A. Authors are divided, and they who maintain the affirmative ſay, that the Levitical Law diſtinguiſhes between ordinary vows, and thoſe vows where any thing is devoted to the Lord; and this they pretend is plain from Leviticus 27. where after many ſurpriſing things about common vows, by which the things themſelves, or money in liew of them, were to be given to the prieſts; at verſe 28. it comes to things devoted, and ſays, notwithſtanding. no devoted thing that a man ſhall devote unto the Lord, of all that he hath, both of men and beaſts, and of the field of his poſſeſſion, ſhall be ſold or redeemed; every thing devoted is moſt holy unto the Lord. And what is meant by being moſt holy unto the Lord, is explained in the next verſe, none devoted, which ſhall be devoted, of man, ſhall be redeemed, but ſhall ſurely be put to death. And they ſay it was before declared, that whatever was the Lord's, as the firſt born of man and beaſt, was to be ſlain, if God did not order its redemption. The firſt-born of man was to be redeemed;* and that of an aſs, if not redeemed by a lamb, was to have its neck broke; and the captives taken in

* Exod. 30. 12, 13, & 34. 19, 20.

war, which fell to the Lord's ſhare, there being no order for redeeming, were, as is owned by all, to be ſlain.

The prophet Micah reckons the putting every devoted thing to death among the Jewiſh inſtitutions, in ſaying, wherewith ſhall I come before the Lord, and bow myſelf before the high God? ſhall I come before him with burnt-offering, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of rams, or with ten thouſands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firſt-born for my tranſgreſſion; the fruit of my body for the ſin of my ſoul? he hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee; but to do juſtly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

Here the ſacrificing of a man's own children is mentioned equally with the ſacrificing of beaſts, which is allowed to be a jewiſh inſtitution; how abſurdly muſt the prophet be ſuppoſed to have argued, after he had preferred juſtice and mercy to a thing commanded by God, if he ſhould go on to prefer it before a thing abhorred by God!

If there could be any doubt in this matter, Jeptha's vow would clear it up for this Jewiſh hero made the vow when the ſpirit of the Lord came upon him, and after making it he wrought a great deliverance for Iſrael: the words of the vow are, whatſoever (or rather whoſoever) cometh forth of the doors of my houſe to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, ſhall ſurely be the Lord's; and I will offer it up to him for a burnt-offering. A vow made by ſuch an extraordinary perſon, and upon ſuch an extraorninary occaſion, looks as though ſomething extraordinary pleaſing to God, was deſigned by that vow; which, though domeſtic animals might have been ſacrificed, muſt relate to perſons capable of acting with deſign; *viz.* of coming out of his houſe to meet him after the victory; which to his great grief his only child did. Had there been

* Mic. 6. 6, to 8.

any way of diſpenſing with this ſolemn vow, he, ſince he had two months time to conſider, would no doubt have found it out; but he ſays, I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back; and he did with her according to his vow. And his daughter, worthy of a better fate, was willing her father ſhould execute his cruel vow, only regretting that ſhe died without being a mother in Iſrael; for that reaſon ſhe was yearly mourned by the daughters of Iſrael.

St. Jerome; as well as the author of the *Queſtions to the Orthodox*, thinks that Jeptha's piety in ſacrificing his daughter, was the reaſon of St Paul's numbering him among the juſt perſons. And

Biſhop Smalridge, in his ſermon about Jeptha's vow, ſays, "that all the fathers, as well as our own homilies, own that he ſacrificed his daughter."

The Jews could not think it abſolutely unlawful for a father to ſacrifice an innocent child, ſince Abraham was highly extolled for being ready to ſacrifice his only ſon, and that too without the leaſt expoſtulation; though he was importunate with God to ſave an inhoſpitable, idolatrous, and inceſtuous city.

No wonder that a ſingle perſon in the power of another might be devoted to God, ſince free and independent nations were ſo devoted; and was by virtue of ſuch a vow, which Iſrael vowed unto the Lord, that the Canaanites, who had never done Iſrael the leaſt injury, men, women and children were to be utterly deſtroyed.*

Had the author of the epiſtle to the Hebrews, who reckons Jeptha among the Jewiſh heroes, though the Jews abhorred all human ſacrifices, he would not, at leaſt without ſome apology for the lawfulneſs of human ſacrifices, have declared one ſuch ſacrifice, where the ſame perſon was both ſacrificer and ſacrifice, to have been of infinite value; in ſaying, that Chriſt offered up himſelf;† and that he put away ſin by the ſacrifice of himſelf;‡ and endeavors to ſhew the Hebrews. that

* Numb. 21. 2, 3. Chap. 11. 32. † Heb. 7. 27—‡ 9. 26.

the blood of the beaſts that were ſacrificed, was of no va'ue in compariſon of the blood of Chriſt, who, thro' the eternal ſpirit, offered himſelf up without ſpot to God.*

B. Admitting the Jewiſh law allowed human ſacrifices, yet the Chriſtian religion, ſure, forbids (ſince Chriſt, according to the apoſtle, ſacrificed himſelf) all human ſacrifices.

A. If putting innocent and conſciencious men to death on account of religion, may be called ſacrificing them, there have been more human ſacrifices than ever were before in the world; and thoſe too not offered up to God, but to the devil, by burning their bodies, and ſentencing their ſouls to hell; and even at this day the papiſts, to perſuade the ſpectators that thoſe they condemn to the flames immediately go to hell, dreſs them up in a San-Benito, or a coat painted all over with flames and devils, and then take their leave of each ſufferer, with this charitable expreſſion: *Jam animam tuam tradimus Diabolo.*

B. I muſt own, this bigotry, which has had ſuch terrible effects among Chriſtians, was little felt, or known in the pagan world.

A. Is not this curſed bigotry owing to the moſt unworthy notions bigots have entertained of the divine perfections; imagining they do ſervice to the creator, by hurting and deſtroying his creatures? The fiery zeal of ſuch wretches is capable of any miſchief: moſt other men, though ever ſo wicked, have ſome remains of pity and humanity, ſome checks of conſcience, and though ever ſo much provoked, time will aſſuage their anger; but the bigot feels not the leaſt remorſe, nor can time abate his fury; and he is ſo far from having any pity, that he glories in the cruelſt actions, and thinks the more helliſh facts he commits the more he merits heaven; and very often gets the reputation of a ſaint, for acting the part of a devil. So that his notions of God and

* Ver. 13—14.

religion, ſerve only to make him infinitely a worſe man, than if he had been without any belief; for then he could have no motives from the next world for doing miſchief; nor would his diſbelief ſtrip him of his humanity, or hinder him, if he judged rightly of his own intereſt, from acting ſo by his fellow-creatures, as, taking in the whole of his life, was beſt for him to do.

B. You repreſent bigotry more odious than it is, in making it worſe than atheiſm itſelf.

A. As bigotry is the worſt ſort of ſuperſtition, ſo you know the philoſophers in general ſuppoſe ſuperſtition to be worſe than atheiſm itſelf. Plutarch in particular, makes it his buſineſs in his tract of deiſidemony, or ſuperſtition, to prove that atheiſm, though an opinion falſe, and even ſtupid, yet it is far leſs hurtful to men than ſuperſtition, and reflects leſs diſhonor on the deity itſelf; for he interprets deiſidemony to be the continual dread of a deity no leſs miſchievous than powerful; which is the moſt odious character that can belong to any intellectual being, and has given birth to thoſe ſhocking notions and diſmal rites in divine worſhip, that have either run men into atheiſm, and expoſed religion itſelf to ridicule and contempt; or made mankind the dupe of deſigning knaves, and taught fierce bigots to exerciſe and then ſanctify the moſt inhuman barbarities.

"The atheiſt," ſays he, "knows no God at all; the ſuperſtitious none but what is monſtrous and terrible; miſtaking for dreadful, what is moſt kind and beneficent; for tyrannical, what is truly paternal; for miſchievouſly inclined, what is full of providential care; nay, for a being brutally ſavage and fierce, what is mere goodneſs itſelf. Shall then the atheiſt be accounted impious, and not this ſuperſtitious perſon much more ſo? I, for my part, had rather men ſhould ſay there is no ſuch perſon as Plutarch, than that he is a man inconſtant, fickle, prone to anger, ready to revenge himſelf upon the ſlighteſt occaſion, and full of indignation for mere trifles, &c. and yet this is no more than what the ſuperſtitious think of the deity; whom of conſequence they muſt as

well hate as fear; they worſhip, indeed, and adore him; and ſo do men even thoſe very tyrants they would be glad of an opportunity to deſtroy. The atheiſt contributes not in the leaſt to ſuperſtition; but ſuperſtition having given out ſo hideous an idea of the deity, ſome have been frighted into the utter diſbelief of any ſuch being; becauſe they think it much better, nay, more reaſonable, that there ſhould be no deity, than one whom they ſee more reaſon to hate, and abominate, than to love, honor, and reverence. Thus inconſiderate men, ſhocked at the deformity of ſuperſtition, run directly into its oppoſite extreme, atheiſm, heedleſsly ſkipping over true piety, that is, the golden mean between both." So much for this philoſopher of the Gentiles, I ſhall now quote a noble chriſtian philoſopher; who ſays, "Atheiſm leaves a man to ſenſe, to philoſophy, to natural pity, to laws, to reputation; all which may be guides to an outward moral virtue, though religion were not: but ſuperſtition diſmounts all theſe, and erecteth an abſolute monarchy in the minds of men. Therefore atheiſm did never perturb ſtates; for it makes men weary of themſelves, as looking no further: And we ſee the times inclining to atheiſm (as the time of Auguſtus Cæſar) were civil times. But ſuperſtition hath been the confuſion of many ſtates, and bringeth in a new *primum mobile*, that raviſheth all the ſpheres of government."

I grant that next to a real bigot, an atheiſt in maſquerade may do moſt miſchief; but then it is by hiding the atheiſt, and perſonating the bigot; and under color of promoting religion, advancing prieſt-craft. And there are no ſmall number of theſe atheiſts, if what the famous Scaliger ſays is true; *Quicumque, Jeſuitæ vel Eccleſiaſtici Romæ in honoribus vivunt, athei ſunt.* And men muſt have a great deal of charity to think better of any proteſtant, whoſe pretended zeal carries him, contrary to the principles of his religion, into perſecuting meaſures.

Had the heathen diſtinguiſhed themſelves by creeds,

made out of ſpite to one another, and mutually perſecuted each other about the worſhip of their Gods, they would ſoon have made the number of their votaries as few as the Gods they worſhipped; but we do not find (except in Egypt, that mother-land of ſuperſtition) they ever quarrelled about their Gods, tho' their Gods ſometimes quarrelled, and fought about their votaries: no, it was a maxim with them, *Deorum injuriæ, Diis curæ.*

By the univerſal liberty that was allowed amongſt the ancient's "Matters" (as a noble author obſerves) "were ſo ballanced that reaſon had fair play; learning and ſcience flouriſhed; wonderful was the harmony and temper which aroſe from theſe contrarieties. Thus ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm were mildly treated; and being let alone, they never raged to that degree as to occaſion bloodſhed, wars, perſecutions, and devaſtations; but a new ſort of policy,——has made us leap the bounds of natural humanity, and out of a ſupernatural charity, has taught us the way of plaguing one another moſt devoutly. It has raiſed an antipathy, that no temporal intereſt could ever do, and entailed on us a mutual hatred to all eternity. And ſavage zeal, with meek and pious ſemblance, works dreadful maſſacre; and for heaven's ſake (horrid pretence!) makes deſolate the earth."

And as this noble author obſerves "the ZEUS ZENIOS (or the Jupiter of ſtrangers) was among the ancients, one of the ſolemn characters of divinity, the peculiar attribute of the ſupreme deity; benign to mankind, and recommending univerſal love, mutual kindneſs, and benignity between the remoteſt, and moſt unlike of human race. Such was the ancient heathen charity, and pious duty towards the whole of mankind; both thoſe of different nations and different worſhip."

But, good God! how different a character do bigots give us of the deity, making him an unjuſt, cruel, and inconſiſtent being; requiring all men to judge for themſelves, and act according to their conſciences; and yet authoriſing ſome among them to judge for others, and to puniſh them for not acting acording to the conſciences

of thoſe judges, though ever ſo much againſt their own.

Theſe bigots thought they were authoriſed to puniſh all thoſe that differ from them in their religious worſhip, as the enemies of God; but had they conſidered, that God alone could diſcern the hearts of men, and alone diſcover whether any, by conſcienciouſly offering him a wrong worſhip, could become his enemies; and that infinite wiſdom beſt knew how to proportion the puniſhment to the fault, as well as infinite power how to inflict it; they would ſurely have left it to God to judge for himſelf, in a cauſe which immediately related to himſelf; and where they were not ſo much as parties concern d, and as likely to be miſtaken as thoſe they would puniſh. Can one, without horror, think of men's breaking through all the rules of doing as they would be done unto, in order to ſet themſelves up for ſtandards of truth for God as well as man? do not theſe impious wretches ſuppoſe, that God is not able to judge for himſelf, at leaſt, not able to execute his own judgment? Not that therefore he has recou ſe, forſooth, to their ſuperior knowledge or power; and they are to revenge his injuries, root out his enemies, and reſtore his loſt honor, though with the deſtruction of the better part of mankind? but,

To do the propagators of theſe blaſphemous notions juſtice, they do not throw this load of ſcandal on the law of nature, or ſo much as pretend from thence to authoriſe their execrable principles; but endeavor to ſupport them by traditional religion, eſpecially by miſinterpreted texts from the old teſtament; and thereby make not only natural and revealed religion, but the old and new teſtament (the latter of which requires doing good both to Jews and Gentiles) contradict each other. But to return:

If what the light of nature teaches us concerning the divine perfections, when duly attended to, is not only ſufficient to hinder us from falling into ſuperſtition of any kind whatever; but as I have already ſhewn, demonſtrates what God, from his infinite wiſdom and

goodneſs, can or cannot command; how is it poſſible that the law of nature and grace can differ? How can it be conceived, that the laws of God, whether internally or externally revealed, are not at all times the ſame, when the author of them is, and has been, immutably the ſame for ever?

CHAP. IX.

Human happineſs being the ultimate deſign and end of all traditional as well as original revelation, they muſt both preſcribe the ſame means; ſince thoſe means, which at one time promote human happineſs, equally promote it at all times.

B. SHOULD I grant you, that natural and revealed religon, as they have the ſame author, muſt have the ſame ends; and that the ultimate end of all God's laws, and conſequently of all religion, is human happineſs; yet there are ſeveral things to be conſidered as ſubordinate ends: and here may not original and traditional religion differ? ſince it is allowed by all, that how immutable ſoever theſe ſubordinate ends are, yet the means to promote theſe ends are various and mutable.

A. Your allowing theſe means to be various and mutable, ſuppoſes no ſuch means ſo preſcribed in the goſpel; but that, agreeably to the law of nature, they are to be varied as beſt ſuits that end for which they were ordained. To imagine the contrary is to make things, dependent on circumſtances, independent; things that are proper only under ſome circumſtances, neceſſary under all circumſtances; nay, to make ends mutable, and means immutable; and that theſe are to continue the ſame, though by change of circumſtances they become prejudicial; nay, deſtructive to the end for which alone they were ordained. The more neceſſary any end is, there

is the the more reaſon for people to be left at liberty to conſider, in the vaſt variety of circumſtances, and those too perpetually changing, what means may be moſt proper for obtaining that end; ſince theſe having no worth in themſelves, can only be valued according as they more or leſs conduce to the purpoſe they were intended for; and where God does not interpoſe, it is incumbent on human diſcretion, chiefly ordained for this end, to make ſuch alterations as the reaſon of things requires.

Did not God always employ the moſt fit and moſt ſuitable means, he would act contrary to the rules preſcribed him by his own unerring reaſon; and ſo he would, did he not leave men at liberty to uſe ſuch means, as their reaſon, given for that purpoſe, told them was fitteſt to be done, in all those circumſtances in which he had placed them; becauſe that would be requiring of them a conduct contrary to his own; and conſequently, a conduct highly irrational: And therefore to alter one's conduct, as circumſtances alter, is not only an act of the greateſt prudence and judgment, but is conſiſtent with the greateſt ſteadineſs.

As far as divine wiſdom excels human: ſo far the divine laws muſt excel human laws in clearneſs and perſpicuity; as well as other perfections. Whatever is confuſed and perplexed, can never come from the clear fountain of all knowledge, nor that which is obſcure, from the father of inexhauſtable light; and as far as you ſuppoſe God's laws are not plain to any part of mankind, ſo far you derogate from the perfections of thoſe laws, and the wiſdom, and the goodneſs of the divine legiſlator; who, ſince he has the framing of the underſtanding of thoſe to whom he dictates his laws, cannot but adapt one to the other. But how can we ſay, that infinite wiſdom ſpeaks plainly to mankind through all generations, except we allow that his commands extend not beyond moral things; and that in all matters of a mutable nature, which can only be conſidered as means, he obliges them to act accord-

ing as they judge moſt proper for bringing about thoſe ends.

Upon any other hypotheſis, human laws have vaſtly the advantage of the divine; as being publiſhed in the language the ſubjects underſtand, in a plain ſimple ſtile, without any allegorical, metaphorical, hyperbolical, or other forced way of expreſſion; and if time diſcovers any inconvenience, or any unforeſeen difficulties want to be cleared up, the legiſlature is ready at hand; or if in the mean time, any doubts about interpreting the laws ariſe, there are ſtanding judges (accountable to the legiſlature) in whoſe determinations people are to acquieſce. But mankind are not to expect, that the divine legiſlator will, from time to time make any change in his laws, and communicate them to all nations in the languages they underſtand; nor can there be any judges with a power to oblige people by their determinations; becauſe ſuch a power being without any appeal, is the ſame as a power to make divine laws; and conſequently the only tribunal God has erected here on earth, diſtinct from that he has mediately appointed by men for their mutual defence, is every man's own conſcience; which as it cannot but tell him, that God is the author of all things, ſo it muſt inform him, that whatever he finds himſelf obliged to do by the circumſtances he is in, he is obliged by God himſelf, who has diſpoſed things in that order, and placed him in thoſe circumſtances. It is for want of obſerving this rule, that the divine writings are rendered ſo obſcure; and the infinity of ſermons, notes, comments and paraphraſes, which pretend to ſpeak plainer than God himſelf, have increaſed this obſcurity. If whatever tends to the honor of God, and good of man, is evident from the light of nature, whence comes all this uncertainty, perplexity, doubts and difficulties? Is it not chiefly owing to the denying people that liberty, which God, out of his infinite goodneſs, has allowed them by the law of nature; and hindering them from judging for themſelves, of the means which

beſt tend to promote this end; and impoſing on them by the terrors of temporal and eternal puniſhment, ſuch needleſs ſpeculations and uſeleſs obſervances, as cannot be conſidered either as means or ends?

B. You know that divines, though they cannot deny what you ſay to be true in general; yet they think there is an exception as to church-matters, and that here men are not permitted to uſe ſuch means as they themſelves think beſt; but ſuch only as thoſe, who ſet up to be their ſpiritual governors, ſhall appoint.

A. Nothing can be more abſurd, than to ſuppoſe God hath taken this power from the people, who have an intereſt to preſerve religion in its purity, every deviation from it being to their prejudice, and placed it uncontroulably in the hands of men, who, having an intereſt in corrupting it, do, generally ſpeaking, ſo manage matters, as if religion was the means, and their power the end for which it was inſtituted. We do not find, that the Mahometan clergy cauſe any confuſion or diſorder among the Muſſelmen; and the pagan prieſts are ſcarce taken notice of in ſtory, ſo little miſchief did they do; while all church hiſtory is full of the vileſt and moſt pernicious things perpetrated by chriſtian prieſts. The chriſtian morals, you muſt own, are too pure and plain to cauſe this difference; what then can it be imputed to, but that independent power which thoſe prieſts uſurped; which, though they claimed it as derived from heaven for promoting godly diſcipline, has occaſioned general diſorder and confuſion? endleſs have been the quarrels ambitious prieſts have had with princes upon the account of this power, to the ſtopping of juſtice, and ſubverſion of almoſt all civil policy; nor have the eccleſiaſtics been leſs embroiled among themſelves, each ſet ſtriving to engroſs a power which can belong to no mortal, And the biſhops, when they had no others to conteſt with, have ever contended among themſelves about ſuperiority, the right of their ſees, and the limits of their juriſdiction; and when their choice depended on the

people, they frequently, eſpecially in their contentions about the greater ſees, run things on to blood and ſlaughter; and I appeal to their own hiſtorians, whether the eccleſiaſtics ever ſcrupled any method to obtain this power: and whenever they got it whether an inſupportable tyranny over body and mind, with the utter ruin of religion, was not the conſequence? and whether it had not, where exerciſed to the height, more fatal effects than all the ſuperſtition of the Gentiles? look the world round, you ſhall every where find men more or leſs miſerable, as they have been more or leſs debarred the rights of acting according to the beſt of their underſtanding in matters relating to religion.

While every church, or congregation of chriſtians, as in the apoſtolical days, choſe and maintained their own miniſters, and ordered among themſelves what required a ſpecial determination, no inconveniences happened; but as ſoon as this ſimple and natural method was broke, and the clergy were formed into a cloſely-united body, with that ſubordination and dependance they had to one another, the chriſtian world was enſlaved, and religion forced to give way to deſtructive ſuperſtition.

Which could never have happened; if the Chriſtians had obſerved theſe general rules, obligatory by the light of nature, as well as the goſpel; and which are alike given to every chriſtian, and oblige one as well as another; ſuch as "doing all things for the honor of God, for edification, for order, for decency; for fleeing falſe teachers, ſeducers, deceivers; for avoiding ſcandal, and offending weak brethren, &c." And here ſince every one muſt judge for himſelf, and cannot make over this right to any other, muſt not all church-matters be be managed by common conſent?

In a word, if we conſider the infinite variety of circumſtances, the different manners and cuſtoms that prevail in different places; the prejudices of the weak, ignorant, and ſuperſtitious; and the deſigns of ambitious men; there is nothing of a mutable nature, if

once eſteemed immutably fixed by God. but muſt ſometimes become prejudicial to the end it was to promote; eſpecially in a religion deſigned to extend over the whole world, as well as to laſt to the end of it. There are but two ways of avoiding this inconvenience; either to ſuppoſe the founder of this religion will from time to time, himſelf ordain ſuch alterations in things of a mutable nature, as thoſe circumſtances, which are diff rent in different places, do require; or elſe, he has left the parties concerned, to act in all places according to diſcretion in ſuch mutable matters.

B. You labor this point; but there are few of your ſentiment.

A. If you mean eccleſiaſtics, perhaps, you are in the right; though I am ſure, I have the church of England on my ſide, if judicious Hooker may be allowed to underſtand its conſtitution, as well as the nature of the eccleſiaſtical polity. He, in the tenth ſection of his third book, maintains this propoſition, that "neither God being the author of laws, nor his committing them to ſcripture, nor the continuance of the end for which they were inſtituted, is reaſon ſufficient to prove they are unchangable:" Where he admirably well diſtinguiſhes between things in their own nature immutable, and matters of outward order and polity, which he ſuppoſes daily changeable; and ſays, "the nature of every law muſt be judged by the end for which it was made; and by the aptneſs of the thing therein preſcribed to the ſame end.—When a thing does ceaſe to be available to the end which gave it being, the continuance of it muſt appear ſuperfluous.—That which the neceſſity of ſome ſpecial truth doth cauſe to be enjoined, binds no longer than that time: but does afterwards become free. Law, though both ordained of God himſelf, and the ends for which they were ordained continuing, may notwithſtanding ceaſe, if by alteration of time, or perſons, they are found inſufficient to attain to that end. In which reſpect why may we not preſume, that God doth even call for ſuch a change or alteration, as the very nature of the things themſelves

doth make neceſſary? God never ordained any thing which could be bettered, yet many things he hath, that have been changed, and that for the better; that which ſucceedeth as better now, when change is required had been worſe, when that which is now changed was inſtituted. In this caſe, men do not preſume to change the ordinance of God, but yield thereunto, requiring itſelf to be changed." And he applies this reaſon honeſtly in ſaying, "the beſt way for us were to hold, even as they do, that in the ſcripture there muſt needs be found ſome particular form of church polity, which God has inſtituted, and which for that very cauſe belongeth to all churches, to all times; but with any ſuch partial eye to reſpect ourſelves, and by cunning to make thoſe things ſeem the trueſt, which are the fitteſt to ſerve our purpoſe, is a thing we neither like, nor mean to follow." And let me add, that moſt, if not all our divines from the reformation till the time of the Laudean faction, were in the ſame ſentiments; and from the mutability of ſuch things as are means to an end, proved, there could be no particular form of church-polity eſtabliſhed by divine authority: and they argued from the example of good king Hezekiah, who, without regard to the ſalutiferous virtue the brazen ſerpent once had, broke it to pieces when perverted to ſuperſtitious uſe. And,

All, who believe means in their own nature are mutable, muſt, if conſiſtent with themſelves, agree with Mr. Hooker: This is ſo very apparent, that nothing but intereſt can make any one talk otherwiſe; therefore, I ſhall only quote the late Dean of Canterbury, who in a ſermon preached before the univerſity of Cambridge, and publiſhed at their requeſt, ſays, "that the very temper, and compoſition of the ſcripture is ſuch, as neceſſarily refers us to ſome other rule; for this is a ſyſtem of mixed and very different duties, ſome of eternal and univerſal obligation; others occaſional and particular, limitted to times and circumſtances; and when theſe occaſions and circumſtances ceaſed, the matter of the command was loſt; and the whole reaſon and force of it

ſunk of courſe: Now thoſe things being oftentimes delivered promiſcuouſly, and in general terms, men muſt of neceſſity have recourſe to ſome other rule, to diſtinguiſh and guide them in making the juſt difference between the one, and the other ſort."

And what other rule is there, by which we can diſtinguiſh rightly in this important matter, but what ariſes from the things themſelves; thoſe which have an innate worth and goodneſs, are of an eternal and univerſal obligation; others, which have no ſuch worth, can be conſidered only as means occaſionally accommodated to particular times, places, perſons and circumſtances; which, of courſe, muſt ceaſe to oblige, when they ceaſe to conduce to the end for which they were appointed; or others become more conducive: and this will more fully appear, if we conſider, as the above-mentioned author obſerves, that "the circumſtances of human life are infinite, and depend on a multitude of actions not to be foreſeen; and conſequently not to be provided againſt. Hence laws muſt run in general terms, and ſometimes the intent of the law is beſt fulfilled by running contrary to the letter; and therefore, reaſon and honeſty muſt guide us to the fitneſs of the thing, and a great ſcope muſt be left to equity and diſcretion." And ſurely, we muſt not ſuppoſe that reaſon, honeſty, equity and diſcretion will teach us one thing, and the traditional law another; eſpecially conſidering that in all God's laws, it is the reaſon of the law that makes it law.

B. By the reaſoning of ſuch divines, I cannot perceive the uſe of any occaſional commands, ſince they ſuppoſe theſe cannot oblige people longer than they judge it fit to obſerve them; otherwiſe there could be no difference between occaſional and eternal precepts; and what they judge fit and proper to be done, they are obliged to do without any occaſional commands; ſo that according to them, whether there are, or are not any occaſional commands, human diſcretion is left at liberty to judge what is fit, or not fit to be obſerved; which, I think, is ſuppoſing all ſuch commands needleſs: yet the

authors you quote ſuppoſe, contrary to your hypotheſis, there have been ſuch commands; particularly in relation to the Jewiſh ſtate.

A. The Jews, taking the ſtory to be literally true, being upon their coming out of Egypt a free people, had a right by the law of nature to chooſe what government and governor they pleaſed; and God would not act ſo inconſiſtent a part, as to deprive them of any of theſe rights he had given them by the law of nature; and therefore did not take upon him the civil adminſtration of their affairs, till he had obtained their expreſs conſent; ſo that here he acted not as governor of the univerſe, but by a power derived from the people by virtue of the Horeb covenant; and the preſumption is, that where there is no ſuch contract, God will not exerciſe ſuch a power; eſpecially conſidering that though the Jews rejected God himſelf from reigning over them, and were for chooſing a new king, yet he bids Samuel thrice in the ſame chapter to hearken to the voice of the people; but of this, and all other arguments of this nature, more fully hereafter.

B. The reaſons you have given do not fully ſatisfy me, but that ſome things may be required by God as governor of the univerſe, which are merely poſitive; nay, that rights, and ceremonies, ſigns, or ſymbols might be arbitrarily enjoined, and ſo intermixed with matters of morality, as to bind the conſciences of all men at all times; and therefore, if you pleaſe, we will review this point.

A. With all my heart; for this alone is the point that muſt decide the queſtion, whether natural and revealed religion do really differ? As for natural religion that, as you well know, takes in all thoſe duties which flow from the reaſon and nature of things, and the relations we ſtand in to God and our fellow creatures; and conſequently, was there an inſtituted religion that differs from that of nature, its precepts muſt be arbitrary, as not founded on the nature and reaſon of things, but depending on mere will and pleaſure; otherwiſe it would be

the ſame with natural religion: and though it is difficult to prove a negative, yet I think, I can fully ſhew you, by adding other reaſons to thoſe already mentioned, that God, the great governor of the univerſe, cannot give mankind any ſuch precepts; and conſequently, that natural and revealed religion only differ in the manner of their being delivered.

CHAP. X.

God does not act arbitrarily, or interpoſe unneceſſarily; but leaves thoſe things, that can only be conſidered as means (and ſuch are in their own nature mutable) to human diſcretion, to determine as it thinks moſt conducing to thoſe things, which are in their own nature obligatory.

IN order to ſettle this point, it is neceſſary to ſee how far this natural law extends; it not only commands that evil doers ſhould be puniſhed, but that men according to the different circumſtances they are under, ſhould take the moſt proper methods for doing it, and vary as exigencies may require; ſo it not only requires that juſtice ſhould be done men as to their claims, but that the readieſt and moſt effectual way of doing it ſhould be taken; and the ſame may be ſaid of all other inſtances of this nature. If God interpoſes further, and preſcribes a particular way of doing theſe things, from which men at no time, or upon no account ought to vary; he not only interpoſes unneceſſarily, but to the prejudice of the end for which he thus interpoſes. And as matters relating to the worſhip of God, it is the voice of nature that God ſhould be publicly worſhipped; and that men ſhould do this in the moſt convenient way, by appointing amongſt themſelves time, place, perſons, and all other things which require ſpecial determination:

and certainly, there is as much reaſon that things of this nature ſhould be left to human diſcretion, as any other whatever; conſidering the different conditions and circumſtances which chriſtians may be under, and the handle deſigning men might otherwiſe take, to impoſe upon weak perſons what they pleaſe, on pretence of divine right.

This being premiſed, the ſole queſtion is, Whether God, who, for many ages, did not command, or forbid any thing, but what was moral and immoral; nor yet does ſo to the greateſt part of mankind, has, in ſome places and in ſome caſes, broke into the rule of his own conduct, and iſſued out certain commands which have no foundation in reaſon; by obliging men to obſerve ſuch things, as would not oblige were they not impoſed; or if the impoſition was taken off, would immediately return to their primitive indifference?

To ſuppoſe, then, ſuch commands, is it not to ſuppoſe God acts arbitrarily, and commands for commanding-ſake; and that too under the ſevereſt penalties? Can ſuch commands be the effects of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs? Or, if there be no reaſon, why a thing ſhould be done at all; or if to be done, why it ſhould be done rather this way than that way; or why men ſhould not vary means, as they judge moſt conduſive to the end, for whoſe ſake alone they were deſigned: Can there be any cauſe, why a being, which never acts unneceſſarily, and whoſe commands are all the effects of infinite wiſwiſdom, ſhould interpoſe? It is ſo far from being ne ceſſary for God to interpoſe in ſuch caſes as theſe, that it only ſerves for a handle to inhuman impoſition; for there is nothing ſo indifferent, but may, if believed to have divinity ſtamped upon it, be perverted by deſigning men to the vileſt purpoſes; and in truth, there is nothing of this nature introduced into religion, but what, I am afraid, has been ſome time or other ſo perverted.

One would think it a thing wholly indifferent, who ſprinkled an infant, or from whoſe hands we received

the ſacramental bread and wine, as long as the rules of decency and order were obſerved; yet has there not been a ſet of men, who, on a pretence of a divine right to do thoſe things, have made the Chriſtian world believe, they have a diſcretionary power to beſtow, or with-hold the means of ſalvation; and, by virtue of this claim, have over-awed them into ſlaviſh obedience, and a blind ſubmiſſion.

There is no good or hurt in drawing two lines croſs one another, and yet what have prieſts made the poor people believe they could do by virtue of it; as curing diſeaſes, driving away devils, and doing an infinity of other miracles? And in ſhort, they have made it one of their chief engines of their craft, for the better carrying on of which, they perſuaded the people to adore the croſs, miraculouſly founded after it had been buried about three hundred years; and the wood of it has ſince ſo wonderfully encreaſed, as to be able to make innumerable croſſes, whereof each bit contained the virtue of the whole.

Confeſſion of ſins to honeſt and judicious perſons might be of ſervice by the prudent advice they gave how to avoid the like ſins for the future; but the Popiſh prieſts claiming a power by divine right to abſolve people upon confeſſion, have been let into the ſecrets of all perſons, and by virtue of it have governed all things; and have made the ſins of the people, not to be pardoned but on their terms, the harveſt of the prieſts.

Among the jews, the anointing with oil was looked on as very medicinal, and generally uſed in ſickneſs; they prayed, and anointed the ſick in hopes of a recovery: But though the anointing in colder climates is thought of no uſe in ſickneſs, yet the papiſts have built a moſt ſuperſtitious practice on it, which, for the greater reverence, they call the ſacrament of extreme unction; and which their prieſts are not to adminiſter as long as there is hopes of recovery.

What can be more indifferent, or harmleſs, conſidered in themſelves, than the ceremonies of oiling the heads

of kings, and laying hands on the heads of elders or preſbyters; and yet what abſurd pretences have not prieſts, who have the art of turning the moſt indifferent things to a ſuperſtitious uſe, drawn from thence to the prejudice of both church and ſtate?

It was an ancient cuſtom among the Hebrews, when they prayed for a bleſſing on any perſon, to lay hands on him: Thus Jacob laid his hands on the ſons of Joſeph, and Moſes on Joſhua. And among the primitive chriſtians, when any congregation choſe their miniſter, they prayed that he might duly execute that office, to which they had ordained him; and in praying, he that was the mouth of the congregation (the whole aſſembly not being able conveniently to do it) laid his hands on him.

This gave a riſe to the clergy to pretend, that their laying on of hands upon a man, was neceſſary to qualify him for the miniſtry; they by that act having given him the Holy Ghoſt, and an indelible character with certain ſpiritual powers; ſo that the people muſt either be without miniſters, or take one they had thus ordained, however unqualified they might think him.

It is a thing indifferent in itſelf, whether men meet to pray in this, or that place; but the Chriſtians out of a ſuperſtitious reverence to the reliques of the martyrs, uſually praying at their tombs, came by degrees, as their reverence for them increaſed, to offer their prayers to them; which was a great change from their praying for them among the other dead, as was in the firſt ages a general practice; and which, ſome of our high-church prieſts are zealous for reſtoring, and pretend we have better proof for its being a catholic doctrine, than for the author of ſeveral books of ſcripture.

The primitive chriſtians frequently conſulting their clergy in relation to marriages, gave them a handle to ſet up for judges by divine right in all matrimonial cauſes; and many prohibited degrees as well as ſpiritual relations, ſuch as god-fathers and god-mothers, &c. were introduced, to give the clergy frequent opportunities

to grant at their own price, dispensations; by which means the succession and inheritance not only of private estates, but of principalities and kingdoms, in a great measure depended on them: And as an appendix to this spiritual usurpation, they hooked in the cognizance of all carnal causes, incontinence in single as well as married persons. Thus you see, how easily mankind may be abused, where it is believed, that religion can require any thing inconsistent with the rights and liberties God has allowed them by the law of nature; and how dangerous it is to trust any thing with men, who pretend a divine right to whatever they can lay hands on. To give an instance how severely this divine right was exerted by the pope, as head of the church: "Robert, king of France, having married a lady of the house of Burgundy, a match very advantageous to the state, and though he had the consent of his bishops, yet he, and the whole kingdom were excommunicated by the pope, because his lady was in the fourth degree of consanguinity, and the king had been-god-father to the child by a former husband; which so distressed the the poor king, that all his servants, except three or four, deserted him; and no one would touch the victuals which came from his table, which were, therefore, thrown to the dogs."

I shall give one instance more: Men are obliged to avoid as much as conveniently they can the infectious conversation of immoral persons; and it was, no doubt, at first a duty in a special manner, for Christians, compassed round with Pagans, to observe this rule in relation to their own body, and agree to shun any such person as one who had his father's wife; and though this is no more than what is daily done in private societies, and was easily practised amongst Christians when they were but few; yet because the minister might collect the votes, and declare the opinion of the assembly, the clergy by degrees not only excluded the congregation from this their natural right; but claimed, as given them by Heaven, a power to excommunicate whom they please, even their own sovereign; and that too for things relat-

ing to their own intereſt: And they forbid not only their own congregations, but all Chriſtians, on peril of their ſalvation, to avoid all commerce with the excommunicated, and ordained, that if he did not in forty days give the church ſatisfaction, the magiſtrate was bound to impriſon him, and confiſcate his eſtate: And the princes, inſtead of reſenting theſe incroachments on their power, had ſo little ſenſe, as to paſs this into a law; not imagining this treatment would reach them. But they ſoon felt, that the church claimed the ſame power over them as over other Chriſtians; looking on all to be alike ſubject to their ſpiritual power. And accordingly kings were excommunicated, their ſubjects abſolved of their oaths of allegiance, and their dominions given to more orthodox princes to be held of the church; which no doubt, was in a flouriſhing condition, when ſhe, as often as her intereſt required it, abſolved princes of their oaths to their ſubjects, and ſubjects of theirs to their ſovereigns; and by virtue of her ſpiritual power, diſpoſed, as ſhe thought fit, of the eſtates of men, honors, and even lives. What has been, may be! And in all probability would be, were the clergy as united among themſelves as formerly.

In a word, there is nothing in itſelf ſo indifferent, either as to matter or manner, but if it be engrafted into religion, and monopolized by the prieſts, may endanger the ſubſtance of it: This has been plainly ſhewn by thoſe divines, who, at the reformation, and ſince, have argued againſt all impoſitions; they have proved that moſt of the corruptions of popery began at ſome rites, which ſeemed at firſt very innocent; but were afterwards abuſed to ſuperſtition and idolatry, and ſwelled up to that bulk as to oppreſs, and ſtifle true religion with their number and weight. And, indeed, there is no ſect, but complains how ſuperſtitiouſly rites and ceremonies are uſed by all, except themſelves; and ſince I am defending the liberties given by God to mankind, and which, without ingratitude to the donor, as well as injury to ourſelves, we cannot give up; I do not doubt but you

will hear me with patience, becauſe if I prove my point, I ſhall, it may be hoped, in ſome meaſure put an end to thoſe otherwiſe endleſs diſputes, which divide, and diſtract the chriſtian world.

Whatſoever is in itſelf indifferent, whether as to matter or manner, muſt be ſo to an all-wiſe being, who judges of things as they are; and for the ſame reaſon that he commands things which are good, and forbids thoſe which are evil, he leaves men at liberty in all things indifferent; and it is in theſe only, that our liberty of acting as we pleaſe conſiſts.

Things, which are of no value in themſelves, can be no motives to an all-wiſe being to puniſh us; or to clog our happineſs with any ſuch needleſs obſervances: And conſequently, men, as far as they aſſert our future happineſs, or any part of it, to depend on ſuch things, do ſo far derogate from the wiſdom and goodneſs of God; and from thoſe motives we have to love, and honor him. The arbitrary commands of a tyrant may be obeyed out of fear, but juſt and rational laws alone can move the affection of rational creatures.

Is it reaſonable to believe, an all-wiſe and gracious being is ſo fond of indifferent things, that he ſubjects his children to ſuffer even in this life on their account? And yet you muſt own, if he has made theſe the ſubject of his commands, they ought to ſuffer every thing rather than not obſerve them; but if God will not have men puniſhed in this world, and much leſs in the next, upon the account of things indifferent; they can never be the ſubject of his commands.

Though a judicious author ſuppoſes a form of divine worſhip, in itſelf indifferent, may be repuired by God for the ſake of peace and unity; yet at the ſame time he contends, that "God does not expect we ſhould comply with that form, if it brings miſery to ourſelves, or confuſion to the public; becauſe that would be preferring a thing in itſelf indifferent to the happineſs of our lives, and the peace of the public; and that to ſuppoſe the contrary, would be breaking in upon the ſpo-

leſs character of our heavenly father, by repreſenting him not as a wiſe and good, but a peeviſh and ill-natured being; who takes an unreaſonable reſentment at the prudent conduct of his children." But will not this as ſtrongly infer, that God could not command the obſerving ſuch things, which, if obſerved, would deſtroy his moral character; and which, inſtead of preſerving peace and unity; would bring miſery on private perſons, and confuſion on the public? Whereas theſe bleſſings of peace and unity can never be obtained by a forced conformity, or by any other method than allowing people their natural liberty in all ſuch matters. And,

If religion conſiſts in imitating the perfections of God, what perfection of God do the ſuperſtitious imitate, when they contend, as *pro aris & focis*, for forms, rites and ceremonies?

If in Heaven there is no room for arbitrary precepts, to incumber that moral goodneſs which is the ſole buſineſs of the bleſſed above; what could hinder us, did we but make that too our only concern here, from enjoying a ſort of Heaven on earth, free from all tyrannical impoſitions, and endleſs quarrels about indifferent things?

In a word, if there is nothing in a religion which comes from God, but what is moſt excellent; what room can there be for indifferent things? Can ſuch things as have no worth or excellency, contribute to the worth, or excellency of religion? If they could, the more they abounded, the more excellent would religion be; which yet is ſo far from being true, even in the opinion of thoſe who contend for ſuch things, that even they, when they are to ſhew the excellency of the Chriſtian religion, recommend it for having but few of thoſe things; which is ſuppoſing it loſes of its excellency in proportion to what it has of this nature; and that they have a higher and more honorable conception of it, who believe it has no ſuch mixture to ſpoil its beauty, and deſtroy its ſimplicity; but that like its author, it is wholly ſpiritual, and as ſuch, worthy its divine original.

One would think these men must appear ridiculous to themselves, who, though they recommend the Christian religion, as purely spiritual, in opposition to the carnal religion of the Jews; yet at the same time contend it has some ordinances, as little spiritual as any of the Jews had; and put a greater stress upon them, than ever the Jews did on any of theirs.

If the works of God shew infinite wisdom, there is no reason to imagine but his laws do the same; but then they must be moral laws, for these alone can speak his wisdom as plainly to all mankind as his works do: They both alike have the character of infinite wisdom impressed on them, and both alike discover their divine original.

If all the laws of God are of a piece, must they not be built on the eternal reason of things? Nay, if that be sufficient to determine him in one case, it must be so in all. But on the contrary, if God acts arbitrary in any one instance, he must, or at least may, do so in all; since no foreign cause, nothing but his nature, could make him act so. But God forbid we should imagine, that any of his laws have not impressed on them the same character of the highest wisdom and goodness, that is impressed on the whole frame of nature, and on every part of it.

It is impossible men should have any just idea of the perfections of God, who think that the dictates of infinite wisdom do not carry their own evidence with them; or are not by their own innate worth discoverable to all mankind. Were it not so, how could they be distinguished from the uncertain opinions of weak and fallible men; not to say the whimsies and reveries of crack-brained enthusiasts? How shocking is it to hear divines cry, that, "certain things, were they not to be adored as mysteries, ought to be exploded as absurdities!"

If we suppose any arbitrary commands in the gospel, we place Christians in a worse condition than those under no law but that of nature, which requires nothing but what is moral; and consequently the greatest part of

mankind, who are to be judged by the law they know, and not by the law they do not know, are, on this supposition, in a better condition as to the next world than Christians; because they do not hazard the favor of God by any mistakes, or omissions in such matters.

To suppose some men, who though they exactly obey the law of nature, may yet be punished, even eternally, for not obeying another law besides; would be to make God to deal infinitely less mercifully with them, than with those that have no other law; and yet in this miserable case are all christians involved, if the gospel requires such things as the law of nature does not; and that too under the severest penalties. And I may add that even as to temporal happiness, those who think original and traditional religion do not differ, are in the better state; since they take delight in their duty, as having nothing required of them, but what they must evidently perform for their good; and consequently free (in temporal happiness) from all panic fear: but those who believe there are things mentioned in religion, of which reason affords no light how they are to be performed, or even what they are, must lie under endless doubts and fears; and according to the measure of their superstition, be wrought upon by designing men to hate, damn, and persecute one another about such observances, as we see is actually done every where by the different sects; who are so absurd as to believe a God of infinite wisdom and goodness can give his creatures arbitrary commands.

When men are at a loss to know from the nature and reason of things, what to believe, and what to practise, and see every where endless divisions; they must be in continual dread of such an arbitrary being, as their unmanly and irrational fears represent God to be. Plutarch makes this difference between the atheist and superstitious; "One believes no deity, the other wishes there was none; if he believes, it is against his will; mistrust he dares not, or call his thoughts in question; but could he, with security, at once throw off that oppressive fear,

which, like the rock of Tantalus, impends and preſſes over him, he would with equal joy ſpurn his enſlaving thought, and embrace the atheiſt's ſtate and opinion, as the happieſt deliverance. Atheiſts are free of ſuperſtition, but the ſuperſtitious are in will and inclination atheiſts, though impotent in thought, and unable to believe of the divine being as they willingly would." And I am afraid, this now is the caſe with moſt of theſe ſuperſtitious perſons, who repreſent God as a moſt cruel being, damning men to eternity, even for their bare opinions; or about ſuch things too, as have no foundation in reaſon. And perhaps the deſire to drown all thoughts of ſuch a tyrannical deity, is no ſmall occaſion of that groſs abſurdity which does every where prevail, and which muſt prevail where ſuperſtition abounds.

It is mens not being governed by the reaſon of things, which makes them divide about trifles; and lay the utmoſt ſtreſs on ſuch things as wiſe men would be aſhamed of. It is on the account of theſe, that the different ſects ſet the higheſt value on themſelves, and think they are the peculiar favorites of Heaven, while they condemn all others for opinions and practices not more ſenſeleſs, than thoſe themſelves look on as eſſentials. And were it not in ſo ſerious a matter, it would be diverting to ſee how they damn one another, for placing religion in whimſical notions, and fantaſtical rights and ceremonies, without making the leaſt reflection on what they themſelves are doing.

What reaſon has a Papiſt, for inſtance, to laugh at an Indian, who thinks, it contributes to his future happineſs to die with a cow's tail in his hands, while he lays as great a ſtreſs on rubbing a dying man with oil? Has not the Indian as much right to moralize this action of his, and ſhew its ſignificancy; as the Papiſt any of his myſtic rites, or *hocus pocus* tricks? which have as little foundation in the nature or reaſon of things.

Suppoſe one came from the furthermoſt parts of the earth, vouching it as a divine revelation, that the nails of our children are, at a certain time, to be pared by

certain perſons with certain ceremonies, in order to make them capable of ſalvation; and that ſuch as died before their nails were thus paired, remained for ever in a very wretched ſtate; would not every one here, without examining into this man's miſſion, or without regard to thoſe ſpiritual things ſignified under paring of nails, reject this belief as unworthy of having God for its author? And yet, as abſurd as this may appear to us, the ſuperſtitious Mahometans think they are obliged to have their nails paired during their ſickneſs, if they apprehend it to be mortal.

They muſt be very little acquainted with the nature of a ſpiritual religion, who think it can any ways conſiſt in not going to reſt when men are ſleepy; not eating, when they are hungry; or abſtaining from, or uſing certain meats and drinks at ſtated times; and in waſhings, ſprinklings, and luſtrations by blood or water: and yet, theſe things were in ſo high a repute with moſt of the pagans, that they thought they would atone for the greateſt immoralities.

Ah nimium faciles, qui triſtia crimina cædis
Fluminea, tolli poſſe putet is aqua.

The *Taurobolia*, or the bedaubing a man in a pit, all over with the blood of a bull, which fell on him through holes made in the plank on which the beaſt was ſlain, was believed to waſh away all his ſins, and he, happy man, regenerated to eternity; provided that once in twenty years he renewed this myſtical regeneration: and not only great perſons, but whole cities might perform this religious ceremony by deputation, and receive the benefit. A ſhort account of this, you meet with in Fotenelle's hiſtory of oracles, taken from Prudentius.

Though the heathen prieſts made the people believe they could be clean from their ſins by ſacrifices, and other external things, yet it was as themſelves had the application of them; they were the perſons to whom the Gods had committed the religious rubbing bruſhes;

though the men of ſenſe amongſt the pagans were not thus to be impoſed on; which made Tully ſay,

Animi labes nec diuturnitate evaneſcere, nec amnibus ullis elui poteſt.

Lactantius ſeems to be of another opinion, in ſaying, "give us one that is unjuſt, fooliſh and a ſinner; and in one inſtant he ſhall be juſt, prudent and innocent; with one laver all his wickedneſs ſhall be waſhed away."

In a word, while prieſts of what denomination ſoever pretend authority to abſolve ſinners, and the people are ſo void of ſenſe as to rely on their abſolution; natural religion, which puts the whole ſtreſs on internal penitence and true virtue in the ſoul, will be deſpiſed; as allowing no ſuccedaneum, no commuting or compounding with heaven. And indeed all ſuch commuting, or compounding powers, where they are ſuppoſed to be lodged, ſerve as a bank of credit for the tranſgreſſors; and are mighty incitements to all manner of villany: and in former days, the great men, after having oppreſſed and plundered people, thought to compound with heaven, by letting the clergy ſhare in the ſpoil; and it is on this notion ſo many abbies and monaſtries have been founded; and the ſuperſtitious, as long as they are perſuaded there is any virtue in externals, will, as we ſee by conſtant experience, chiefly depend on ſuch things. And I may add,

This doctrine, that one man may not only merit for himſelf by doing more than God requires of him; but that the merit of ſuch actions may be transferred to another, who has done leſs than God requires of him, has been a great inciterment to wickedneſs: and thoſe who have acted a moſt immoral part during their whole lives, have believed they might comfortably rely on it; nothing being thought too hard for merit and mediation.

There are none, I think, now ſo abſurd, as in words to maintain, that there is the leaſt variableneſs in God, much leſs that he is an arbitrary being, commanding

things for commanding ſake; yet are not they, who aſſert there are merely poſitive things in the chriſtian religion, guilty of this abſurdity; in ſuppoſing that God who had the goodneſs for a long time, not to confine mankind to any indifferent things; yet at length changed his mind, and repented of his great goodneſs; and arbitrarily deprived, they will not ſay, all mankind but no ſmall number of this liberty; and required of them the belief of certain uſeleſs ſpeculations, and the practice of certain indifferent things on the ſevereſt penalties. And when they lament that the chriſtian world, even from the earlieſt days has been in perpetual broils about ſuch things, do they not ſuppoſe that God can give arbitrary commands, and that thoſe commands are involved in great obſcurity? Whereas, if merely poſitive things were required, thoſe, not being like matters of morality, diſcoverable by their own light, would be made as plain as infinite wiſdom could render them; and to prevent their being perverted to ſerve ill purpoſes, we ſhould have been punctually told when, how, and by whom, thoſe arbitrary things ſhould be applyed, as well as that they were to be obligatory for ever.

B. If God has revealed any thing in a way liable to be miſtaken, he cannot be diſpleaſed with ſincere people for miſtaking it.

A. That is very true, but certainly, the end of God's giving any precepts, was not to deliver them ſo obſcurely that people might be faultleſs if they miſtook; but make them ſo plain that they could not well miſtake: and this is agreeable to infinite wiſdom directed by infinite goodneſs, which, certainly, will give us equal degrees of evidence for religious truths, which ſo much concern us, as it has done for truths of leſs importance.

For my part, I cannot help being of the ſentiments of a learned divine, who after having proved at large, that morality is capable of demonſtration, concludes by ſaying, * "I ſhall only here repeat, that man being a reaſonable agent, reaſon is the law and rule of his actions; there is no truth in the mathematics more clear, and inconteſtible than

* Fidde's body of divinity, part 2. b. 1. c. 11.

this. Now it is eaſy for him, when he examines his actions by this rule, to ſee whether they agree together, as to know when two lines are compared, whether they are of the ſame, or a different length.—Why ſhould demonſtration be confined only to numbers and figures?—Nay, if we argue from the importance of morality, it will be found much more agreeabe to the goodneſs of God, who gave us our intellectual faculties, that the truths which are of the greateſt concern to us, ſhould, if we make a due uſe of thoſe faculties, admit of the the greateſt evidence." I think, I need only add, that was there any thing but morality neceſſary to conſtitute true religion; we might be certain that the goodneſs of God would give us a demonſtration for it, equal to that he has given us for morality. But,

If there are now things which are not moral in religion, does not that ſuppoſe a change of mind in God, and then, where will you ſtop? for if changeableneſs was not a perfection, it would not be in him; and if all his perfections are infinite, muſt not this be ſo too? and is it not as reaſonable to ſuppoſe, he may command ſome indifferent things to day, and others to-morrow; or ſome in this part of the world, or ſome in another; as at firſt to command moral, and then ſuperadd indifferent things? If different things can contribute to the perfection of revelation, there may be endleſs revelations; and the laſt always moſt perfect, as having new indifferent things.—It was not about things of a moral nature, that there were ſuch diviſions in the primitive times, and that montaniſm ſpread itſelf over a great part of the chriſtian world; the followers of Montanus, as Euſebius writes, boaſting that he was the Paraclete, and that priſcilla and Maximilla his companions were his propheteſſes? And Tertullian, as is owned by the tranſlator of his apology, ſays, "that the law, and the prophets were to be looked on as the infancy; and the goſpel, as it were the youth; but that there was no compleat perfection to be found, but in the inſtruction of the Holy Ghoſt, who ſpake by Montanus." But to make ſome apology for his lapſed

father, he says, "the arch heretic Montanus supported the character of the most holy, mortified, and extraordinary person for a considerable time; the world rung with visions and prophesies of him, and his two damsels; and the face of severity and saintship consecrated their reveries, and made real possession pass for inspiration.—The churches of Phrygia, and afterwards other churches, divided upon the account of these new revelations; and even the very bishop of Rome himself for some time espoused the vanity, and made much of the impostor." And had he continued so to do, it might, perhaps, have obtained; since we find the christians in the primitive times came intirely into a more gross imposture, and had faith for the most palpable forgery of the Sybilline oracles being writ by real propheteſſes under divine inspiration. And the whole christian world for more than the two first centuries believed the millenarian heresy, as it is now called; for which, indeed, they pretended other proofs than the divine authority of the Sybils. And there has scarce been an age since, but where some such attempt has been made, and that of popery, which is the grossest attempt on the credulity of mankind succeeded; though the monks in the twelfth century were not satisfied even with that; and therefore endeavoured to introduce a new gospel, called *evangelium æternum*, or the gospel of the Holy Ghost: and affirmed that this gospel of the spirit excelled that of Christ's, as much as the light of the Sun does that of the Moon.

In short, to this belief, that there may be things in religion not founded on nature and reason, and that these may be reserved for this, or that period of time, are owing all the visions and reveries among the papists, and other ecclesiastic christians; and upon this absurd notion is founded the most spreading religion of Mahomet, who pretended to be the paraclete promised by Jesus to comp'eat, and perfect all things: and,

In a word, to this belief are owing all the false revelations; that ever were in the world; and except we allow there are certain tests flowing from the nature of

things, whereby the meaneſt capacities may diſtinguiſh truth from falſhood, we ſhall for ever be liable to be impoſed on by mad-men; as well as impoſtors.

If God can command ſome things arbitrarily we cannot be certain, but that he may command all things ſo; for though ſome commands ſhould relate to things in their own nature good, yet how can we know that an arbitrary being commands them for this reaſon; and, conſequently, ſince an arbitrary will may change each moment, we can never be certain of the will of ſuch a being. And,

To ſuppoſe that God by the law of nature leaves men at liberty in all indifferent things, and yet by a poſitive law reſtrains this liberty in certain parts and ages of the world; is to ſuppoſe God determins one way by immediate and another by mediate revelation; both laws too ſubſiſting at the ſame time.

B. We ſay that the law of nature, however immutable as to good and evil has enjoined nothing in relation to indifferent things; ſo that there is a large field in which all legiſlators, human as well as divine, may exert their power.

A. It is true, the law of nature leaves men at liberty to act as they pleaſe in all indifferent matters; and if any traditional law abridges this liberty, ſo far it is contrary to that of nature, and invades thoſe rights which nature and its author has given mankind.

Human legiſlators are ſo far from having a right to deprive their ſubjects of this liberty, that their main end in ſubmitting to government is, to be protected in acting as they think fit in all ſuch caſes where no one is injured; and herein the whole of human liberty conſiſts, the contrary being a ſtate of mere vaſſalage; and men are more or leſs miſerable, according as they are more or leſs deprived of this liberty; eſpecially in matters of mere religion, wherein they ought to be moſt free.

To ſuppoſe God has *in theſe laſt days*, as they are called in ſcripture, deprived any part of mankind of

that liberty which before was granted to all, would be to make him act unreasonably; since all those reasons which obliged him to command good or forbid evil things, must wholly cease in relation to a subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither; and was there any reason to deprive men of their liberty in indifferent things, they would then cease to be indifferent. On the contrary the same reasons which oblige him to interpose in things, whose nature is either good or evil, forbids it in indifferent things; since mens happiness depends on their liberty in all such things. Whatever is unreasonable for God to do, is contrary to the eternal law of his nature; and consequently, to deprive men in any of these cases, is to make the dictates of his nature, and his revealed will to clash.

In short, the law of nature either is, or is not, a perfect law; if the first, it is not capable of additions; if the last does it not argue the want of wisdom in the legislator, in first enacting such an imperfect law, and then in letting it continue thus imperfect from age to age; and at last thinking to make it absolutely perfect by adding some merely positive and arbitrary precepts. To what end does God continually impress on christians as well as others this law of nature; since that was needless had they another more perfect, and more plainly revealed.

If men have been at all times obliged to avoid superstition, and embrace true religion, there must have been at all times, sufficient marks of distinction; which could not arise from their having different objects, since God is the object of both: but from the having different notions of him and his conduct: nay, allowing that the light of nature was sufficient to teach men, that true religion consists in entertaining such notions of God as are worthy of him; and superstition in such as are unworthy of him: yet that alone would not enable men, when they came to particulars, to distinguish one from the other: and, therefore, the same light of

nature muſt teach them what notions are worthy, and what unworthy of having God for their author. But how can there be ſuch marks flowing from the nature of religion and ſuperſtition, if what is ſuperſtition by the light of nature can notwithſtanding theſe marks, be made a part of religion by revelation?

If he who reſembles God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, is it not, as biſhop Tillotſon ſays, "becauſe he finds theſe perfections in ſome meaſure in himſelf, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man ſo ſure a notion of things as practice and experience; every good man is in ſome degree partaker of the divine nature, and feels that in himſelf, which he conceives to be in God; ſo that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he ſees the image of God in himſelf, and is able to diſcourſe of him from an inward ſenſe and feeling of his excellency." But this would not be juſt-arguing, if God was an arbitrary being, and could command his creatures things which carried no perfection or goodneſs with them.

In a word, if the eſſence of religion conſiſts in believing and practiſing ſuch things, as have a real worth and excellency in them, tending to the honor of God and the good of men; the eſſence of ſuperſtition, which is its oppoſite, muſt conſiſt in imagining to propitiate an all-wiſe and gracious being by ſuch things as have no worth or excellency in them; ſuch as may not be done, as done; or as well done this, as that way. Superſtition is defined by Dr. H. More (and all our divines ſpeak to the ſame purpoſe) to be that impiety, by which a man conſiders God to be ſo light or paſſionate, as with trivial things, either to be appeaſed, or elſe moved to wrath. Can any thing be more trivial than uſeleſs ſpeculations and unneceſſary obſervations?

How numerous ſoever chriſtians may be, though they are but few in compariſon of the reſt of mankind, yet the church of Chriſt, by the confeſſion of all parties, is a very ſmall body of men; each ſect, though

they complain of one another's uncharitableneſs, yet they excluding all other ſects, either as ſchiſmatics or heretics, confine ſalvation to their own church. Dr. Scott ſays, "While men behold the ſtate of religion thus miſerably broken and divided, and the profeſſors of it crumbled into ſo many ſects and parties, and each party ſpitting fire and damnation at its adverſary; ſo that if all ſay true, or indeed any two of them in five hundred ſects, which there are in the world (and for ought I know there may be five thouſand) it is five hundred to one, but that every one is damned; becauſe every one damns all but itſelf; and itſelf is damned by four hundred and ninety nine:" how, I ſay, can theſe differences be avoided, as long as men take into their religion, nay, make unneceſſary things neceſſary parts of it? and if many of our divines have got rid of theſe abſurd notions, is it not becauſe they are, what in contempt they are called, rationaliſts?

The pious biſhop Taylor ſays, "He could not expect, but that God would ſome way or other puniſh Chriſtians, by reaſon of their pertinacious diſputing of things unneceſſary, undeterminable and unprofitable; and for their hating and perſecuting their brethren (which ſhould be as dear to them as their own lives) for not conſenting to one another's follies and ſenſeleſs vanities."

But, is there any certain way of judging what are neceſſary or unprofitable things, but by the rules here laid down, of judging of things from their nature and tendency? Without obſerving this rule, there is nothing ſo trifling, or ſenſeleſs, but people may be perſuaded to place religion in, and be in continual broils about it. If a diſpute between two preachers, whether the firſt words in the Lord's prayer ſhould be tranſlated father our, or our father, could cauſe ſuch diſturbances, as it lately did at Hamburgh; what is there ſo indifferent, if once believed to belong to religion, but may have pernicious effects? And there are a number of inſtances in all ages, where things as trifling have occaſioned ſtrange diſorders.

And the primitive times were not free from them; the memorable Mr. Hales gives this account of the then quarrel about the time of keeping Eaſter: "It being," ſays he, "upon error taken for neceſſary, that an Eaſter muſt be kept; and upon worſe than error, if I may ſo ſpeak, (for it was no leſs than a point of Judaiſm forced upon the church) thought further neceſſary, that the ground for the time of our keeping that feaſt, muſt be the rule left by Moſes to the Jews; there aroſe a ſtout queſtion, whether we were to celebrate it with the Jews on the fourteenth moon, or on the Sunday following? This matter, though moſt unneceſſary, moſt vain, yet cauſed as great a combuſtion as ever was in the church; the weſt ſeparating from the eaſt for many years together. In this fantaſtical hurry, I cannot ſee but all the world were ſchiſmatics, neither can any thing excuſe them from that imputation, excepting only this, that we charitably ſuppoſe that all parties, out of conſcience did what they did. A thing which befel them, through the ignorance of their guides; and becauſe thro' ſloth and blind obedience men examined not the things they were taught; but like beaſts of burthen patiently couched down, and indifferently underwent whatever their ſuperiors laid upon them."

"And can we," ſays Dr. Burnet, "think without aſtoniſhment, that ſuch matters, as giving the ſacrament in leavened or unleavened bread; or an explication of the proceſſion of the holy ghoſt, whether it was from the father and the ſon, or from the father by the ſon; could have rent the Greek and Latin churches ſo violently one from another, that the Latins rather than aſſiſt the other, looked on till they were deſtroyed by the Ottoman family?

And other inſtances he gives of fatal diſturbances from diſputes about trifles; as the removing the pictures of certain biſhops out of a church occaſioned image-worſhip; for thoſe who oppoſed their removal, went ſo far as to maintain, that pictures ought not only to be ſet up, but worſhipped; which cauſed not only great diſor-

ders in the eaſt, but made Italy to revolt at the pope's inſtigation, This conteſt too begat another, whether the ſacrament was only the image, or the very ſubſtance of Chriſt?

I might add, that the diſpute between the Lutherans and Calviniſts about the ſacrament, though it has created ſuch fierce animoſities, is merely verbal ſince both ſides are againſt any change in the elements, and both ſides maintain a real preſence of the body of Chriſt.

I need not have gone to diſtant times and places for inſtances, our own late diviſions and perſecutions about ſuch trifling things, as rites and ceremonies, nay, habits and poſtures, would in all likelihood have ended in the utter ruin both of church and ſtate, had not the bleſſed revolution interpoſed.

B. I would not have you treat what you call poſtures ſo irreverently; ought not people to kneel at their devotions?

A. The whole chriſtian world for many ages thought not; and the *Anti-Nicene* fathers, as well as the council of Nice forbad kneeling on all Sundays, and all other days between Eaſter and Whitſunday.

In a word, if thoſe ſentiments muſt be true, which tend moſt to make men love and honor God, by giving the brighteſt and nobleſt ideas of his wiſdom and goodneſs; and which free him from the imputation of change and inconſtancy, and from impoſing from time to time arbitrary commands; and from partiality and reſpect of perſons; what I have laid down muſt be true; and the contrary, not only falſe but impious. But however, ſince this is a point of the utmoſt conſequence, I ſhall proceed to other arguments, and ſhew how inconſiſtent it is with the good of mankind, to ſuppoſe any merely poſitive things to be part of the ingredients which conſtitute true religion.

CHAP. XI.

The ſuppoſing things merely poſitive to be made the ingredients of religion, is inconſiſtent with the good of mankind as well as the honor of God.

THE happineſs of human ſociety, and of every particular member, conſiſting in the due obſervation and practice of morality; whatever diverts, or diſcourages that, muſt be highly injurious: now it is certain, that the mind may be over-loaded as well as the body; and the more it is taken up with the obſervation of things, which are not of a moral nature, the leſs it will be able to attend to thoſe that are; which requiring the application of the whole man, can never be rightly performed, while the mind, by laying ſtreſs on other things, is diverted from attending on them; eſpecially if it be conſidered, that ſuperſtition, if once ſuffered to mix with religion, will always be gaining ground, If religion is to be heard, no unneceſſary things will be admitted; but if it be not, where ſhall we ſtop? If people are once brought to believe ſuch things are good for any thing, they will be apt to believe they are good for all things; at leaſt, pretences will never be wanting for a thouſand things of this nature; and there is nothing of this kind that men will not come into, if they are made to believe they carry any merit with them: Theſe they will be punctual in obſerving, in hopes to atone for indulging themſelves in their darling vices; which they, not knowing how to leave, and yet willing to ſecure their future happineſs, hope by the help of ſuch expedients to compound with Heaven; and then vainly imagine, they cannot have too many things of this nature; or ſhew too great a zeal for the practice of them.

when assured by their priests (who as they fondly imagine, know the whole counsel of God) that they are acceptable to the deity: and tend to make him propitious to the religious observers of them.

The banditti, and bravoes most religiously observe the orders of their church, about not eating flesh, &c. and instances of this nature might be produced from the most immoral in all churches; who, not satisfied with practising such things themselves, think it highly meritorious to compel others to do the same. And, indeed, the substance of religion has been destroyed in most places to make room for superstition, immorality and persecution; which last, when men want reason to support their opinions, always supplies its place. And are there not even now, numbers in the best reformed churches, of the same sentiments with those Dr. Scott complains of? "Who," he says, "persuade themselves, that God is wonderfully concerned about small things, about trifling opinions and indifferent actions, and the rites and modes, and appendages of religion; and under this persuasion they hope to atone for all the immoralities of their lives, by the forms and outsides of religion; by uncommanded severities, and affected singularities; by contending for opinions, and stickling for parties; and being pragmatically zealous about the borders and fringes of religion," And,

I am afraid it is too true, as is observed in the letters concerning inspiration; that "men have thought it an honor to be stiled that which they call zealous orthodox, to be firmly linked to a certain party, to load others with calumnies, and to damn by an absolute authority the rest of mankind; but have taken no care to demonstrate the sincerity and fervor of their piety, by an exact observation of the gospel-morals: Which has come to pass by reason that orthodoxy agrees very well with our passions; whereas the severe morals of the gospel are incompatible with our way of living." And one would be apt to think, that zeal for speculative opinions, and zeal for morality were scarce consistent. Should be

form his judgment from what he fees moſt practiſed. "Moral goodneſs," ſays Dr. Scott, "is the great ſtamp and impreſs that renders men current in the eſteem of God; whereas on the contrary, the common brand by which hypocrites and falſe pretenders to religion are ſtigmatized, is their being zealous for the poſitives, and cold and indifferent as to the morals of religion."

"And, in general, we find mere moral principles of ſuch weight, that in our dealings with men, we are ſeldom ſatisfied by the fulleſt aſſurance given us of their zeal in religion, until we hear ſomething further of their character. If we are told a man is religious, we ſtill aſk, What are his morals? But if we hear at firſt that he has honeſt moral principles, and is a man of natural juſtice and good temper, we ſeldom think of the other queſtion, Whether he be religious and devout."

It is a general obſervation in hiſtory, that where any thing has had the appearance only of piety, and might be obſerved without any virtue in the ſoul, it eaſily found entertainment among ſuperſtitious nations. Hence Tacitus ſays, "Men extremely liable to ſuperſtition, are at the ſame time as violently averſe to religion." Le Clerc not only makes the ſame remark, but ſays, "Thoſe who had a confuſed notion of Chriſtian piety, believed it could not maintain itſelf without the help of outward objects; and I know not what heatheniſh pomp, which at laſt extinguiſhed the ſpirit of the goſpel, and ſubſtituted paganiſm in its room."

Whatever appearance it might have of piety, what virtue did it require in the practice, to make war with the Saracens for the holy land; (though conſidering the impieties committed there, it might be called unholy;) yet ſo highly meritorious was this project for ſeveral ages thought to be, that vaſt ſhoals of bigots for its ſake have frequently gone from the Weſt to fight men in the Eaſt, who never did them any harm; and theſe bigots, preſuming on the merits of this ſacred expedition, were moſt enormouſly flagitious.

B. If this was ſuperſtition, it was built on a notion which had long before prevailed, of believing it a piece of piety to viſit Jeruſalem, and the holy places there. The great St. Jerome ſays, *Certe adoraſſe ubi ſteterunt pedes domini, pars fidei eſt*, &c. "That it was undoubtedly a part of faith, to go, and worſhip in thoſe places, where the feet of our ſaviour had once ſtood; and to have a ſight of the tracks, which at this day continue freſh, both of his nativity, croſs and paſſion."

A. I believe St Jerome, when he ſays, We ought to worſhip where the feet of our Lord ſtood, chiefly intended his laſt footſteps when he mounted up to Heaven; the print of which, ſays, Sulpicious Severus, remain to this day. *Quæcunque applicabantur, inſolens humana ſuſcipere terra reſpueret, excuſſis in ora apponentium ſæpe marmoribus.———Et cum quotidie confluentium fides certatim domino calcat adiripiat, damnum tamen arena non ſentiat: & eadem adhuc ſui ſpeciem, velut impreſſis ſignata veſtigiis, terra cuſtodit.* And Paulinus ſays the ſame.

A ſtrict obſervance of ſuch things as require no virtue in the practice, and may with great eaſe be punctually obſerved, makes the ſuperſtitious liable to be every where cheated by your Tartuffs, or Mackw—ths; while men who put their whole ſtreſs on morality, are repreſented not only as enemies to religion, but even as encouragers of immorality, and mere libertines, becauſe they are for liberty in thinking; though this cannot fail to make men ſee the folly of licentiouſneſs in acting.

And indeed, we ſhall generally find thoſe eccleſiaſtics, who inveigh moſt againſt free thinking, are the real encouragers of immorality; by ſcreening, not only the moſt immoral of their own order on pretence of preſerving the honor of the church, though to the diſhonor of religion; but alſo by laying the moſt moral, if they differ from them in ſpeculative points, under conſtant ſufferings, to enforce them to play the hypocrites with God and man: And who is it that the corrupt part of the clergy ſhew more inveteracy againſt, than the very

beſt men of their own order, for not approving theſe methods?

It is worth while to remark, how differently men are treated for civil and eccleſiaſtical offences: "In civil caſes," as a right reverend and excellent author obſerves, the offender, if his crime be not capital, ſuffers a temporary puniſhment, proportioned to the fault he has committed; and when he has undergone that, nothing further is required of him, except in ſome caſes to find ſecurity for his good behaviour for the future. But in caſes of hereſy, there is no regard to the degree of the offence, in the puniſhment inflicted: Nor is there any end of it. It is not enough to have ſuffered the ſevereſt puniſhment, though for the ſmalleſt offence; it is not enough to give ſecurity of not offending for the future: The innocent offender muſt declare (what it is oftentimes impoſſible he ſhould declare) that he has changed his ſentiments, and is become orthodox; and this, though perhaps no methods of conviction have been uſed, except that of puniſhment be one. This is the miſerable condition of a convict-heretick: The puniſhment which fell on him for expreſſing thoughts heretical, he muſt continue to endure for barely thinking; which is a thing not in his own power, but depends on the evidence that appears to him: He muſt for ever (cruel juſtice!) for ever ſuffer for his private thoughts (though they go not beyond his own heart) the puniſhment of this overt-act has once drawn upon him. To puniſh *toties quoties*, as often as theſe overt-acts are repeated, will not ſatisfy the holy office.——If an offender cannot be convicted of hereſy, he may however be convicted of writing, or ſpeaking againſt the eſtabliſhed doctrine of the church; and that will draw on him all the ſame conſequences, that hereſy would do.—Well does this author adviſe, whatever you do, be orthodox: Orthodoxy will cover a multitude of ſins, but a cloud of virtues cannot cover the want of the minuteſt particle of orthodoxy.——It may, I doubt not, be demonſtrated with the greateſt evidence, that all chriſtian churches

have ſuffered more by their zeal for orthodoxy, and by the violent methods taken to promote it; than from the utmoſt efforts of their greateſt enemies. But for all that, the world will ſtill think the ſame methods neceſſary."

A man, who has, or pretends to have a blind zeal for thoſe things, which diſcriminate his ſect, though he be ever ſo immoral, too often finds countenance and credit from them; and though thought a devil by others, paſſes for a ſaint with his own party: So that the ſuperſtitious lie under temptation to be vicious, and the vicious to act ſuperſtitiouſly. Nay,

"The way that men are apt to take to pacify God, is," as archbiſhop Tillotſon obſerves, "by ſome external piece of religion.——Such as were ſacrifices among the Jews and Heathens.—The Jews pitched upon thoſe which were moſt pompous and ſolemn; the richeſt, and the moſt coſtly; ſo they might but keep their ſins, they were well enough content to offer up any thing elſe to God; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

"And thus it is among ourſelves, when we apprehend God is diſpleaſed with us.——We are content to do any thing, but to learn righteouſneſs.

"As to the church of Rome,"——he ſays, "they (as they pretend) are the moſt ſkilful people in the world to pacify God.——I do not wrong them by repreſenting them enquiring after this manner: Shall I go before a crucifix, and bow myſelf to it, as to the high God?—To which of the ſaints and angels ſhall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf? Will the Lord be pleaſed with thouſands of *pater-noſters*, or with ten thouſands of *Ave-Maries*? Shall the hoſt travel in poſſeſſion, or myſelf undertake a tedious pilgrimage? Or ſhall I liſt myſelf a ſoldier for the holy war? Shall I give my eſtate to a convent? Or chaſtiſe, and puniſh my body for the ſin of my ſoul?"

The heathen prieſts, knowing what could render them acceptable to the people, made the chief part of their religion to conſiſt in gaudy ſhews, pompous ceremo-

nies; and such other tricks as served to amuse, and divert them, who, provided they entertained such notions as created a reverence for their priests, and believed they could discover to them the will of their Gods; might be as lewd, and wicked as their Gods themselves: "Are the Gods angry? Must we repent of our crimes, and re-enter into the paths of natural justice to divert their thunder? Not at all; only take a calf of such a colour, calved at such a time, and let his throat be cut by a religious butcher, in a such dress, with a consecrated knife; and the Gods, as you will find by the entrails, will be strait appeased."

The mahometans make the going a pilgrimage to Mecca, the highest act of religion; and there, out of deep devotion, play many monkey-tricks; and then, they return cleansed from all impurity. As to the Jewish priests, and the Doctors, who depended on them, we learn from our saviour, how they made the moral law void by their vain traditions; and that the temple then, as the church in after-times, was made the grand pretence. And what vile things has not the abused name of the church patronized? Nay, even in the best constituted church, have we not lately had numbers of men fond of the name of high-church, whose religion chiefly consisted in drinking for the church; cursing, swearing, and lying for the church; raising riots, tumults, and sedition, in favor of a popish pretender, and all for the security of the protestant church of England; and in having a profound veneration for black gowns, no matter what the wearers are; and a great contempt for men in black cloaks, how deserving soever; and in firmly believing, that those who go to places with steeples can never be in the wrong; and that those who go to places without them, can never be in the right; without knowing what either hold, or so much as what is the true meaning of even the word church?

What advantage have not the Popish priests gained by their arts of reconciling the practice of vice with the prospect of Heaven. The Jesuits, tho' the young-

eſt order, yet flouriſh moſt, being the moſt expert in this artifice; as may be ſeen in Mr. Paſcal's Provincial Letters. But all the Popiſh prieſts agree, in defending their ſuperſtition by fire and faggot; while their churches are open ſanctuaries for the moſt flagicious; which ſhews how ſenſible they are, that ſuperſtition and immorality ſupport each other. And perhaps, it is but reaſonable, that the places where they learn vile things, ſhould protect them when they have commited the vileſt. It is by theſe means that holy church gets a terrible party, who cannot refuſe to maim or murder, as their ſpiritual protectors direct, for fear of being delivered up to civil juſtice; and not only your mean rogues, but even the greateſt, have been frequently ſcreened this way.

The ſuppoſing indifferent things equally commanded with matters of morality, tends to make men believe they are alike neceſſary: Nay, the former will, by degrees, get the better with the ſuperſtitious; and acquire ſuch a veneration by age, and to make men have recourſe to them upon all occaſions, though ever ſo unſeaſonable. If people can be ſo far impoſed on, as to admit ſuch things into their religion, they will as eaſily be perſuaded to put a greater ſtreſs on things, though of ſome uſe in religion, than their nature will bear to the confounding things of the greateſt moment with thoſe of the ſmalleſt: and if this is reckoned ſuperſtition, much more ought the other to be thought ſo.

The not diſtinguiſhing means from ends, has been the occaſion of endleſs ſuperſtition; and there have been numbers, in all ages, eſpecially of the female ſex, who have thought themſelves very religious, if they, though to the neglect of their family-concerns, went from church to chapel, from chapel to church, and were punctual in obſerving all church ceremonies, without regarding the end for which alone they could be inſtituted; ſo that inſtead of being humble, affable, and good, they have proved big with the worſt of pride, ſpiritual pride; cenſuring and deſpiſing their neighbors, though ever ſo good, if they were not as punctual as

themſelves in obſerving thoſe things; and the conceit they had their own godlineſs, has made them as troubleſome at home as abroad, as bad wives as neighbors.

Upon the whole, nothing can be of worſe conſequence, than thus to depreciate morality, by mixing things of an indifferent nature with it; becauſe, as experience ſhews, men are more or leſs virtuous according to the value they put on virtue; and can a man, who acts contrary to reaſon, not be an enemy to religion founded on reaſon? The precepts of natural religion, and the rules of right reaſon, cannot but make ſtrong impreſſions on rational creatures; what is fixed on the minds of men, and wrought in as it were with their very conſtitution, cannot eaſily be broke through; human nature is apt to ſtart, and recoil at any ſuch attempt: And yet ſome have found a moſt effectual way to break through it, by teaching men, that the moſt moral actions, without a right notion, forſooth, in certain things of another nature, are to be looked on, as *ſplendida peccata*, and partaking of the nature of ſin.

It is the chief buſineſs of preachers, to ſhew the reaſonableneſs of the doctrines they teach, as the moſt effectual way of operating on rational creatures; and all the laws of natural religion being built on their own reaſonableneſs, they, who attend to the dictates of their reaſon, can ſcarce fail to pay a ready and chearful obedience to all its laws; but when men take things merely on authority, and would have taken the contrary on the ſame authority; reaſon is diſcarded, and rational motives ceaſe to operate: nor can men any longer perform moral duties with a free and cheerful mind; but ſlaviſhly obey, out of fear, the ſuppoſed arbitrary commands of a being too mighty to be contended with; and that only with a view to atone for immoralities.

As long as men believe the good of the ſociety is the ſupreme law, they will think it their duty to be governed by that law; the believing God requires nothing of them but what is for the good of mankind, will place the whole of their religion in benevolent actions, and to the utmoſt

of their abilities copy after the divine original; but if they are made to believe there are things which have no relation to this good, neceſſary to ſalvation; they muſt ſuppoſe it their duty, to uſe ſuch means as will moſt effectually ſerve this purpoſe; and that God, in requiring the end, requires all thoſe means as will beſt ſecure and propagate it. And,

It is to this principle we owe the moſt cruel perſecutions, inquiſitions, cruſades and maſſacres; and that princes have endeavored, not only to deſtroy their ſubjects, but to diſinherit their own iſſue, and to make room for ſuppoſititious children. And,

It is to this principle we alſo owe innumerable tumults, ſeditions, and rebellions, even againſt the beſt of princes; as well as endleſs feuds and animoſities in private families, and among the neareſt relations: They whom this principle governs cannot be good men, good ſubjects, good citizens, or good neighbors; no ties of friendſhip or gratitude, no vows or oaths can bind them, when the intereſt of ſuch things, as they think, they are obliged to promote, on pain of God's diſpleapleaſure, requires the contrary conduct.

They Jews, as they were moſt ſuperſtitious, ſo were they moſt cruel; and as the Papiſts have, beyond all other Chriſtians, introduced into religion things which are far from contributing to the good of mankind; ſo they have exerciſed a matchleſs cruelty for the ſupport of them: And no wonder, ſince their prieſts gain by the ſuperſtition of the people, and conſequently, inſpire them with a proportionate hatred againſt all who will not comply with it. And,

Among Proteſtants, of what denomination ſoever, they who lay the greateſt ſtreſs on uſeleſs ſpeculations, modes and ceremonies; are for the moſt part ſour ill-natured perſons, ready to come into any perſecuting meaſures for their ſake. But nothing has done ſo much miſchief as that moſt monſtrous opinion of *Imperium in Imperio*. Thoſe, who pretended to a ſpiritual empire, claimed, as well they might, a divine right to judge of

the extent of that empire, and to do all they judged neceſſary for its ſupport; and conſequently, that they had a right, ſince temporal things muſt give place to ſpiritual, to depoſe the governors of the ſtate, whenever they judged it neceſſary for the ſafety of the church. It is from hence there have been ſo many tumults, ſeditions, inſurrections, rebellions, civil wars, murders and maſſacres upon the pretence of religion; and which at laſt ended in the enſlaving of the Chriſtian world to the pope, as head of the church; whoſe power of depoſing heretical princes was for many ages univerſally allowed; no nation, no univerſity declaring againſt it; nor ſo much as one divine, civilian, or caſuiſt. Nor were things mended, when, by reaſon of the great ſchiſms about the popedom, councils pretended to govern the church: They then carried their power to ſuch a height, as diſpoſed princes to enter into agreements with the popes, to whom they yielded a great deal, to be protected in what they had reſerved to themſelves. They, therefore, who maintain, that people may forfeit their properties, by ſchiſm, hereſy, infidelity, &c. play the hypocrites, when they pretend the power of princes is more ſacred than the properties of the people, for whoſe ſake they have all their power. And therefore we may juſtly conclude, that they who are for ſoliciting kings and magiſtrates to aſſiſt the church in puniſhing miſbelievers, are equally enemies to the power of kings, as well as to the rights of the people; and they have never failed to ſhew it, whenever they have found it their intereſt.

And though at firſt thoſe princes were idolized, who were the inſtruments of their cruelty; yet when by their means, the people were entirely at the devotion of the clergy, they too were ſoon forced to ſubmit; and had juſt cauſe to curſe their own predeceſſors bigotry, which enabled the eccleſiaſtics to inſult them as they pleaſed. And what diſturbances have not your Beckets, Lauds, &c. created here, when they got into power, and became then as inſolent as before they were ſubmiſſive?

Father Paul, no ſtranger to our conſtitution, in one of his letters, writ in the reign of king James I. ſays thus: "As for the Engliſh, I am in fear; the great power the Biſhops have though under a king, makes me very jealous; for ſhould they have an eaſy prince or an archbiſhop of a high ſpirit, the kingly power muſt ſink by the biſhops aſpiring to an abſolute dominion."

I believe you will allow, that in the late times men were as much in earneſt about religion as ever; and yet by their mixing ſeveral things, not of a moral nature, with it, and thinking all means proper to promote them lawful; impoſture and zeal, bigotry and hypocriſy were ſtrangely blended together. And as we are aſſured by an eminent hiſtorian, it was the opinion of Cromwell, that "the moral laws were only binding in ordinary caſes; but that upon extraordinary ones theſe might be ſuperceded, he, and that ſet of men, juſtifying their ill actions from the practice of Ehud and Jael, Sampſon and David." *

Here, indeed, they were no hypocrites; but frankly confeſſed what at the bottom influences all thoſe, who, though they have not the grace to own it, make things, not of a moral nature, neceſſary ingredients of religion, and thereby give too juſt occaſion for this remark of archbiſhop Tillotſon's, "That it will be hard to determine, how many degrees of innocence and good-nature, or of coldneſs and indifference in religion, are neceſſary to overbalance the fury of a blind zeal; ſince ſeveral zealots had been excellent men, if their religion had not hindered them; if the doctrines and principles of their church had not ſpoiled their diſpoſition." What can be a greater ſatyr on any religion, than that it is able to ſpoil the beſt diſpoſition; and that, if it does not make men arrant devils, it is only becauſe nature is too hard for principles.

B. Theſe ſure are uncommon principles.

A. Not ſo uncommon, as you may imagine, ſince all religion inclines men to imitate what they worſhip; and

* Bp. Burnet's ſum of affairs before the reſtorat. p. 46—79.

they who believe that God will damn men for things not moral, muſt believe, that in order to prevent damnable opinions from ſpreading, and to ſhew themſelves holy, as their heavenly father is holy, they cannot ſhew too much enmity to thoſe, againſt whom God declares an eternal enmity; or plague them enough in this life, upon whom in the life to come God will pour down the plagues of eternal vengeance. Hence it is, that animoſity, enmity and hatred, have over-run the Chriſtian world; and men, for the ſake of theſe notions, have exerciſed the utmoſt cruelties on one another; the moſt curſing and damning churches having always proved the moſt perſecuting. The Papiſts, though they declare it to be their duty to love their own enemies, yet looking on all proteſtants as the enemies of God, think it meritorious to murder them; and proteſtants had no ſooner renounced thoſe perſecuting principles of popery, but they too ſhamefully practiſed the ſame themſelves, for the ſupport of ſuch trifling notions as the public had not the leaſt intereſt in. And before the happy revolution, the ſpirit of perſecution was ſo outrageous, that proteſtants ruined proteſtants upon the account of rites, ceremonies, habits, &c. to the great joy of the common enemy. And,

Though there may be, even now, ſome who will not forgive their being debared the exerciſe of their former tyranny, and would be glad, at any rate, to deſtroy that hated liberty we are now bleſſed with; yet I may venture to ſay, that all who have ſo juſt an opinion of religion, as to think it requires nothing but what is for the good of mankind, are to a man zealous for the preſent government, eſtabliſhed on the principles of civil and religious liberty.

To preſerve which, the legiſlature has not only excluded all Papiſts, as men of perſecuting principles, from the crown; but by affording protection to diſſenters, has ſet the differing churches in South and North Britain on a level, well knowing, that neither civil nor eccleſiaſtical liberty can be preſerved on any other

foot. Had they gone a ſtep farther, and excluded, on the ſtricteſt teſts, men of perſecuting principles from inferior poſts, as well as the perſecuting Papiſts from the higheſt, they had acted up to thoſe principles of proteſtantiſm upon which the revolution is founded. And all, who are in earneſt about religion, would have been highly pleaſed to have it an eſtabliſhed maxim, that no man ought to ſuffer in his perſon, his property, or reputation, for his opinion in matters of mere religion.

They, who think force lawful, for the ſupport of ſuch opinions as cannot be ſupported by reaſon, (as what church, when it has power, does not ?) cannot but think fraud ſo too; eſpecially when it is uſed not only for men's eternal but temporal good, and to prevent ſuch ſeverities, as otherwiſe would be thought wholeſome and neceſſary. How can men of theſe principles think any untruth not lawful, when it is neceſſary to guard fundamental truths? Nay, muſt they not think it much more their duty to deceive men, for the ſake of their eternal good, than to deceive children or ſick people for an infinitely leſs good; eſpecially when the temporal intereſt of the deceivers is joined with the ſpiritual intereſt of the deceived; who, happy men, have the good luck to be cheated into paradiſe; and by the ſtratagem of a pious fraud to obtain an heavenly crown? If it be lawful to deceive melancholy perſons, who deſign to poiſon themſelves, and put a remedy in the place of the poiſon, can any think ſuch an artifice unlawful, when he believes it is to hinder millions from imbibing ſuch notions, as are rank poiſon to their immortal ſouls?

It is with an ill grace that thoſe proteſtants, who are for reſtraining the liberty of the preſs, or ſuffering nothing to be printed, but what has undergone their ſpunges, rail at the papiſts for their *index expurgatorius*: Theſe men may, indeed, plead authority; ſince, as Daillé obſerves, "This opinion has always been in the world; that to ſettle a certain and aſſured eſtima-

tion upon that which is good and true, (that is to fay ;) upon what we account to be fuch ; it is neceffary to remove out of the way whatfoever may be a hindrance to it : Neither ought we to wonder, that even thofe of the honeft, innocent, primitive times made ufe of thefe deceits, feeing for a good end they made no fcruple to forge whole books.

They, indeed (and fuch there are, to the honor of the prefent time, not a few) who think fincerity will carry men to Heaven, lie under no temptation to ufe pious frauds; but for men of other principles, though they go under the name of fathers and faints, there is no depending on them; fince a defire to deceive people into their opinions, will hold in proportion to the zeal they have for propagating thofe opinions.

If thofe men, in whofe hands the facred books from time to time have been chiefly depofited, did allow that every man was to judge for himfelf of their meaning, in order to make him acceptable to God; there could be no danger of their being defignedly corrupted : But if they believed, that a certain fet of opinions was neceffary to falvation, then they muft have thought themfelves in charity obliged to take the moft proper methods to bring men to embrace them; and confequently muft have believed it their duty to fubftitute fome words of their own, which would beft expreſs thofe opinions, on which the falvation of men depended, in the room of others, which were apt to lead them into fatal errors ; fince by thus changing of founds, they might fave millions of fouls, who they were confident would otherwife everlaftingly periſh. Muft not the fame principle that obliged them to impofe their own works, inftead of the words of God, in their creeds and articles, on pain of damnation, equally oblige them to act the fame part in relation to the fcripture ? And if men have ftuck fo clofe to this principle, that they have (whenever they had a convenient opportunity) left out, added to, or altered all other books of religion whatever, which have fallen into their hands ; there can be no reafon to think,

they would not do the ſame with the bible, where the motives were ſo much ſtronger? "It is no wonder," ſays that primitive father Dyonyſius, biſhop of Corinth, "that ſome attempt to adulterate the holy writings of our Lord; ſince they have baſely falſified ſuch as are of an inferior authority." And it muſt be either to put a ſtop to, or prevent this practice, that the revelation concludes with a curſe on all who ſhould make any alteration in that book. And it is morally impoſſible, but they who thought it their duty to commit the moſt barbarous acts of cruelty for propagating of opinions, ſhould not think it lawful to uſe deceit for the ſame end; which they can never imagine to be evil, while they ſuppoſe it ſo uſeful for the ſaving of the ſouls of men, without giving up all the other indirect methods they took to hinder men from ſeeing what may be ſaid for or againſt any opinions.

Nor is there any one thing in which all parties agree, but in taking it for granted, that their adverſaries will ſcruple no means to gain credit to their opinions, or to diſcredit thoſe of their adverſaries; and in order to it, miſrepreſent their perſons as well as opinions, and make men ſaints or devils, as it ſerves their cauſe: which, as you will find in church-hiſtory, has afforded a number of miracles for the orthodox, and as many judgments on the heterodox: And if there be miracles on both ſides, ours to be ſure are divine, and yours diabolical.

If ever the words of David, that all men are liars, were literally true, it has been in this caſe; and all hiſtory ſhews the juſtneſs of my lord Bacon's remark: *Maxime habenda ſunt pro ſuſpectis, quæ pendent quomodocunque a religione; ut prodigia livii.*

The Arabian writers are full of miracles done by Mahomet, which they impoſe on people, by telling them, that "Mahomet's enemies would not invent them; and his friends are forbid telling lies of him on pain of damnation."

B. You may make as bold as you will with Maho-

metans; but can you charge proteſtant writers, much leſs the holy fathers, with any ſuch practices?

A. I hope, it is no crime to take notice, that one of the ten reaſons the celebrated Chillingworth gives for his turning Papiſt, is, "Becauſe the proteſtant cauſe is now, and hath been from the beginning, maintained with falſifications and calumnies, whereof the prime controverſy-writers are notoriouſly, and in a high degree, guilty." And upon his return to the church, he ſays, *iliacos intra muros peccatur & extra;* which is in plain Engliſh, *prieſts of all denominations will lie alike.* And I may add, that it is ſo fully proved in the hiſtorical eſſay of the thirty-nine articles, that that clauſe in the twentieth article, that the church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controverſies of faith, had neither the ſanction of parliament or convocation; that no one has offered the leaſt reply, though for the honor of thoſe good church-men who firſt forged it, and thoſe who ſince defended it, we might expect all that could be ſaid, though the clauſe had not given them a power which can only belong to parliaments, of decreeing rites and ceremonies; and another power, which can belong to no mortal; authority in controverſies of faith. What credit ought to be given to the repreſentations of modern divines, we may, in ſome meaſure, learn from a pamphlet entitled, The Repreſentation of the preſent State of Religion; with regard to the late exceſſive Growth of Infidelity, Hereſy and profaneneſs, as it paſſed the lower houſe of Convocation: Where are almoſt as many notorious falſehoods, as there are paragraphs; not to ſay any thing of a certain paſtoral letter. And if we look into church-ſtory, we ſhall find it to have been the conſtant practice of a certain ſet of men, not only to impute to their adverſaries opinions which they diſowned; but to repreſent thoſe opinions as ready to prevail, was it not for their interpoſition: By which means they hoped not only to be highly reverenced for their great zeal, but to have new powers granted them to oppreſs mankind. Thus the conſequence of

belying the followers of Wickliff, was the ſtatute *de hæretico comburendo*, granted at the petition of the clergy; and the belying the Albigenſes, Waldenſes, &c. raiſed a cruſado againſt thoſe poor people.

As for the holy fathers, they, as Daillé has a whole chapter to prove, did not think themſelves in their controverſal writings (and moſt of their's were ſuch) obliged to ſpeak the truth; but that every thing was lawful which ſerved to gain the victory. They thought they might by way of economy or diſpenſation, ſay one thing and mean the contrary: "Origen, Methodius, Euſebius, Appollinaris," (ſays St. Jerome) "have writ largely againſt Celſus and Porphyry; do but obſerve," ſays he, "the manner of their arguing, and what ſlippery problems they uſed. They alledged againſt the Gentiles, not what they believed, but what they thought neceſſary; *non quod ſentiunt, ſed quod neceſſe eſt, dicunt.* And adds, I forbear mentioning the Latin-writers, as Tertullian, Cyprean, Minutius, Victorinus, Lactantius, and Hilary; leſt I ſhould ſeem rather to accuſe others, than defend myſelf:" And yet he goes on charging not only St. Paul, but even Jeſus Chriſt himſelf with the ſame practice. And there was nothing ſo ſacred that could eſcape being changed, either in whole or in part; even the canons of the famous council of Nice, as well as the canons of other councils, have been falſified; and thoſe forged canons of Nice the popes for many ages impoſed on the Chriſtian world as genuine; and the ancient Liturgies, though things of daily uſe, underwent divers alterations: Nay, even the creeds themſelves, though thought to be the ſacred depoſitum of the faith, have had the ſame fate. "It is well known," ſays Bennet, "that the Apoſtles creed has received various additions to the original form; That the Nicene creed was enlarged by the Conſtantinopolitan fathers, and has alſo, with reſpect to the filioque, been interpolated by the Latin church; that it is probable, the Latin church has interpolated the Athanaſian creed too, with reſpect to the filioque:" Nay, the Athanaſian creed itſelf, as biſhop Burnet has ſhewn, was a forgery of the eighth cen

tury. Nor did they confine their forgeries to church-matters, but practiſed on the imperial laws, and inſerted in the Theodoſian code, a reſcript of Conſtantine, relating to the power of biſhops, long before repealed.

The farther back we go, the greater was the recourſe to pious frauds. Scaliger, ſpeading of the primitive Chriſtians, ſays, *omnia, quæ putabant Chriſtianiſmo conducere, bibliis interſeruerunt.* And as he ſuppoſes, nothing certain of the church till the times of Pliny, ſo he ſays, ſpeaking of the ſecond century, *Adeo verbum Dei ineffícax eſſe cenſuerunt, ut regnum Chriſti ſine mendacio——promoveri poſſe diffiderunt, ut qui utinam illi primi mentiri cœpiſſent.* And Caſſaubon ſays, *Illud me vehementer movit, quod videam primis eccleſiæ temporibus quam plurimos extitiſſe, qui ſacinus palmarium judicabant, cœleſtem veritatem figmentis ſuis ire adjutum; quo facilius nova illa doctrina gentium ſapientibus admitteretur.* And the learned Blondel ſays, "That the ſecond century of chriſtianity, whether you conſider the immoderate impudence of impoſtors, or the deplorable credulity of believers, was the moſt miſerable time, and exceeded all others in holy cheats; and that, to the diſgrace of Chriſtianity, there was a greater averſion to lying, more fidelity, and a greater ſimplicity not to depart from the truth, to be found in profane authors, than the Chriſtian writers."

Our moſt learned biſhop Stillingfleet, ſays, "That antiquity is moſt defective where it is moſt uſeful; namely, in the times immediately after the apoſtles: And that the fathers were often deceived with pious frauds, but then it was when they made for the Chriſtians." And the pious biſhop Fell does not ſpeak quite ſo tenderly in ſaying, *Tanta fuit primis ſeculis fingendi licentia, tam prona in credendo facilitas, ut rerum geſtarum fides exinde graviter laboraverit; nec orbis tantum terrarum, ſed & Dei eccleſia de temporibus ſuis myſticis merito queratur.*

How unhappy were we of the laity, had we not the

reaſon and nature of things (which no prieſts can alter) to depend on; but were intirely obliged to take our religious ſentiments from men, who as far as we have any account of things, have, even from the earlieſt times, not ſcrupled to forge, not only whole paſſages, but whole books; and left nothing entire on which they they could lay their foul hands: Which, as that great and honeſt critic Daillé obſerves, "has rendered the writings and venerable monuments of antiquity ſo imbroiled, and perplexed, that it will be the hardeſt matter in the world for any man to make out any clear or perfect diſcovery of thoſe things, which ſo many ſeveral artiſts have endeavored to conceal from us." As to this impoſing temper of the eccleſiaſtics, I ſhall only ſay, that it is plain from hiſtory, that the ambitious, domineering part of the clergy, the impoſers of creeds, canons and conſtitutions have proved the common plagues of mankind; and the true authors and fomenters of the moſt general and moſt fatal calamities, which have befallen the Chriſtian world. What the conſequence was of impoſing creeds, may be learnt from an eminent father, who flouriſhed when the trade of creed-making was at its height. "It is," ſays St. Hilary, "a thing equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are at preſent as many creeds, as there are opinions among men.—We make creeds arbitrarily, and explain them as arbitrarily.—We cannot be ignorant, that ſince the council of Nice," (there it ſeems the fatal miſchief began) "we have done nothing but make creeds.——We make creeds every year, nay, every moon; we repent of what we have done; we defend thoſe that repent; we anathematize thoſe we have defended; we condemn the doctrine of others in ourſelves, or our own that of others; and reciprocally tearing one another in pieces, we have been the cauſe of one another's ruin."

Thus you ſee, how fraud and force are unavoidable, when it is believed things, having no foundation in nature and reaſon, are neceſſary parts of religion; and

eccleſiaſtical hiſtory contains a continued ſcene of villainy, for the ſupport of ſuch notions: And that the more good ſenſe, piety, and virtue any man was endowed with, the more, if he did not come into thoſe notions, was he hated, and perſecuted, as a moſt dangerous enemy. But,

Before I leave this melancholy ſubject, I muſt obſerve, theſe men have done their beſt to juſtify a remark of Uriel Acoſta, who, in his *Exemplar Vitæ humanæ*, ſays, "That when men depart ever ſo little from natural religion, it is the occaſion of great ſtrifes and diviſions; but if they recede much from it, who can declare the calamities which enſue?" And can men more depart from it, than by impoſing upon their brethren, either by fraud, or force, things no ways tending to the the good of mankind?

Though we cry up the great advantage we have above all other animals, in being capable of religion, yet thoſe animals, we deſpiſe for want of it, herd more ſocially together; except ſuch carnivorous creatures which neceſſity ſeparates. The ants, notwithſtanding they have ſtings, are crouded in vaſt numbers in the ſame hillock; and, having all things in common, ſeem to have no other contention among them but who ſhall be moſt active in carrying on the common intereſt of their ſmall republic. And much the ſame may be ſaid concerning the bees and other animals; yet men though they cannot ſubſiſt but in ſociety, and have hands, ſpeech, and reaſon to qualify them for the bleſſings of it above all other animals; nay, what is more, have religion, deſigned to unite them in the firm books of love and friendſhip, and to engage them to vie with one another in all good offices; and the good natured laity too have, at a vaſt expence, hired perſons to inculcate theſe generous notions; yet alas! in ſpite of theſe of all helps and motives, religion has been made by theſe very perſons, a pretence to render men unſociable, fierce and cruel; and to act every thing deſtructive to their common welfare: And the greate:

the number of theſe religious, and the more expence people have been at in maintaining them, the more of theſe miſchiefs have they moſt ungratefully occaſioned to their generous benefactors.

B. Granting that a deluge of every thing that is ill has overflowed Chriſtendom, and does ſo ſtill in moſt places; and that religion has been made a handle for ſuch barbarities, as human nature, left to itſelf, would ſtartle at; yet how is this to be remedied?

A. Education is juſtly eſteemed a ſecond nature, and its force ſo ſtrong, that few can wholly ſhake off its prejudices, even in things unreaſonable and unnatural; and muſt it not have the greateſt efficacy in things agreeable to reaſon, and ſuitable to human nature? Let thoſe, therefore, who have the education of youth, recommend morality as the end of all religion; and let every thing, not tending to promote the honor of God and the good of man, be accounted ſuperſtition; let the youth be taught to join the ideas of virtue with the ideas of beauty, pleaſure, and happineſs; and the ideas of vice with thoſe of deformity, grief, and miſery: there would then be little room for ſo odious a thing as vice to take poſſeſſion of the minds of the people, and juſtle out virtue ſo firmly rooted. For theſe ideas, thus early aſſociated, would by degrees become inſeparable; eſpecially if men, as they grew up, were frequently ſhewn the neceſſary connexion between theſe ideas; and how eſſential virtue is to the felicity of nations, families, and private perſons; and on the contrary, how miſerable vice muſt render men in every ſtation of life.

It was after this manner, that the heroes of old, thoſe benefactors to mankind, were educated; and the diſcourſes of the philoſophers, who had the inſtructing them, were full of the intrinſick lovelineſs of virtue and the deformity of vice; and taught them to direct all their actions to the common good, as to a common centre; and that their future as well as preſent happineſs depended on it. But afterwards the education of youth being committed to men of another ſtamp, devot-

ed to the intereſt of their own order; they, inſtead of infuſing theſe noble ſentiments into them, perſuaded them that their ſeparate intereſt, with the things on which it depended, which they called the good of the church, was to be their chief aim: And ſo little regard have ſome men had to the common good, that they have induſtriouſly dreſſed up vice in ſuch lovely, and virtue in ſuch odious colours, as to maiutain, that bating the conſequences of a future ſtate, they would act like fools, who did not indulge themſelves in a vicious courſe. And I believe, men of ſuch principles cannot boaſt of much more virtue, than a late prelate of uncommon parts and learning, who from the pulpit endeavored to prove, that "in this life the virtuous man is moſt miſerable;"* and who, by all his actions, eſpecially, by his late monſtrous practices, ſhewed how firmly he had believed his own doctrine; and how reſolved he was, that virtue ſhou'd not make his preſent life miſerable.

B. I grant you, it is of the utmoſt conſequence to the common-wealth, that youth ſhould be rightly inſtructed in all ſuch principles as promote the common good; but can you imagine pagan philoſophers could infuſe more generous ſentiments into them, than Chriſtian clergy-men?

A. I do not think ſo, when they are ſuch clergy-men as thoſe who have at preſent the inſtructing our youth; otherwiſe I cannot help giving into the ſentiments of a noble author, who, ſpeaking of the education of youth, when inſtructed by philoſophers, ſays, "It tended to make them as uſeful to the ſociety the lived in as poſſible. There they were trained up to exerciſe and labor, to accuſtom themſelves to an active life; no vice was more infamous than ſloth, nor any man more contemptible, than he who was too lazy to do all the good he could. The lectures of their philoſophers ſerved to quicken them up to this; they recommended above all things the duty to their country, the preſervation of the laws and public liberty; ſubſervient to which they

* Atterbury's fun. ſermon on Mr. Benner.

preached up moral virtues, such as fortitude, temperance, justice, a contempt of death, &c. They taught their youth how, and when to speak pertinently; how to act like men, to subdue their passions, to be public-spirited; to despise death, torments and reproaches, riches, and the smiles of princes as well as their frowns, if they stood between them and their duty. This manner of education produced men of of another stamp than appears now upon the theatre of the world, such as we are scarce worthy to mention, and must never think to imitate, till the like manner of institution grows again into reputation: Which in enslaved countries it is never like to do, as long as the ecclesiastics, who have an opposite interest, keep not only the education of youth, but the consciences of old men in their hands."

B. This, I confess, is the right way to prevent immorality; but if every thing, as you contend, ought to be looked on as superstitious which is not of a moral nature, superstition has spread itself over the face of the earth, and prevailed more or less to all times and places.

A. This is no more than what hath been owned long ago by a very good judge, who says, *superstitio fusa per gentes, oppressit omnium fere animos, atque hominum occupavit imbecillitatem.* And the universality of superstition is in effect owned by every sect, in affirming that superstition is crept into all sects; and that it is the chief business of their respective teachers to promote it: And is it possible to be otherwise, as long as men are taught to build their religion on a narrower foundation, than that on which the universal being has universally laid it?

It is the observation of the naturalists, that there is no species of creatures, but what have some innate weakness, which makes them an easy prey to other animals, that know how to make the advantage of it: Now the peculiar foible of mankind is superstition, which at all times has made them liable to be practised on, not by creatures of different species, but by those of their own; who, by a confident pretence of knowing more than

their neighbors, have firſt circumvented the many, the credulous and unwary; and afterwards forced the free-thinking few into an outward compliance: And as far as we have an account of things, we ſhall find that moſt of the prevailing ſuperſtitions have been erected on this foundation, and to it owe their whole ſupport. And whoever knows any thing of France and Italy, not to mention other countries, cannot but know that the better ſort are ſenſible of the prevailing abſurdities; but, overawed by the prieſts and mob, are forced to ſubmit. And,

The more ſuperſtition the people have, the eaſier they may be impoſed on by beſieging eccleſiaſtics; and the leſs religion the clergy have, the more unanimous they will be carrying on their common intereſt; and when the clergy are without religion, and the people abound in ſuperſtition, the church, you may be ſure, is in a flouriſhing condition; but in great danger, when men place their religion in morality: For then all indifferent things are looked on as they are in their own nature, indifferent; then the people have no ſuperſtitious veneration for the perſons of men, and the clergy are eſteemed only in proportion to the good they do; and every evil they commit is reckoned a breach of truſt, they being maintained by the people chiefly to ſet them good examples: But this method of gaining all that reverence and authority they pretend to, has, it ſeems, been too laborious and ſervile. They have (I mean, where popery prevails) as maſters of the religious ceremonies, moſt effectually gained their end, by introducing ſuch things into religion, as have promoted a ſuperſtitious veneration to themſelves; and made people believe, that the chief means to obtain their eternal happineſs, were of a different nature from thoſe, which cauſed their temporal happineſs; and only to be diſpenſed by them, in order to get the ſole management of ſpirituals to themſelves; and conſequently, (ſince there cannot be at the ſame time two ſupreme powers) of temporals alſo: And ſo well have they ſucceeded, that, in

in moſt places, the temporal intereſt of the clergy paſſes for the ſpiritual of the laity.

There are two ways which never fail to make ſuperſtition prevail; myſteries to amuſe the enthuſiaſts, eſpecially the pretenders to deep learning, and all that admire what they do not underſtand; and gaudy ſhew, and pompous ceremonies, to bewitch the vulgar: And the popiſh church, whoſe conduct ſhews how well they underſtand their intereſt may vie with the old Egyptian church for myſteries; and Pagan Rome muſt yield to Chriſtian Rome in ſuch ſhews, rites, and ceremonies, as dazzle the eyes of the people, and inſenſibly gain their hearts; and the more there are of theſe in any church, the more the clergy, the holy diſpenſers of them are reverenced; not to ſay adored by the unthinking multitude; as they are in the church of Rome. "That church has," as archbiſhop Tillotſon obſerves, "weakened the force of Chriſtianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amuſing them with external rites, which they have multiplied to that exceſſive degree, as to make the yoke of Chriſt really heavier than that of Moſes; and the Chriſtian religion a more external and carnal commandment than that of the law; and have diverted the minds of men from the main deſign of Chriſtianity.——They have had no leiſure to think of being good men, and to mind the great and ſubſtantial duties of the Chriſtian life.———The ſimplicity of the Chriſtian worſhip they have incumbered with ſo many frivolous rites and obſervances, as not only render it more burdenſome, but leſs apt to make men inwardly and ſubſtantially good, than Judaiſm itſelf."

This great man obſerves, that "thoſe things which are agreeable to our nature, our reaſon, and our intereſt, are the great things which our religion requires of us.——And that mankind might have no pretence left to excuſe them from theſe, the Chriſtian religion has ſet free from thoſe many outward poſitive obſervances, that the Jewiſh religion was incumbered withal; that we might be wholly intent on theſe great duties, and

mind nothing in compariſon of the real, and ſubſtantial virtues of a good life." If ſo, can we ſuppoſe the Chriſtian religion has ſuperadded any outward poſitive things of its own, to hinder us from being wholly intent on theſe duties?

The popiſh prieſts are ſo far from giving the people any juſt idea of God, that they repreſent him as an arbitrary and tyrannical being, impoſing, on the higheſt pain, the practice of ridiculous ceremonies, and the belief of abſurd doctrines; as a fantaſtical being, angry without cauſe, and pleaſed without reaſon; as a vainglorious being, fond of having his miniſters and favorites, that is, themſelves, live in pomp, ſplendor, and luxury, to the miſerable oppreſſion of the people. But it is no wonder, that they are made to believe, that God requires the obſerving indifferent things on the ſevereſt penalties; ſince their prieſts claim the ſame power, in making ſuch things neceſſary to the communicating in their holy church; out of which, they affirm, ſalvation is not to be had. I wiſh I could ſay, the popiſh prieſts only were guilty of this horrid impiety; and that ſome others had not been as zealous for impoſing ſuch things, by making them neceſſary terms of communion, and damning thoſe that durſt not comply with them; and who ſeem to be of the ſpirit with the famous biſhop Gunning, who, when the preſbyterians urged that lights, holy water, and ſuch like, might as well be impoſed as the croſs and ſurplice; replied, the more the better. But if external rites, as archbiſhop Tillotſon obſerves, have eat out the heart of religion in the church of Rome; by parity of reaſon, religion ſhould ſeem to have made the deepeſt impreſſion on the Quakers, who are the moſt averſe to things of this nature; and are therefore hated by the formaliſts of all churches.

B. Senſible things make a deeper impreſſion on the minds of the common people than words; and therefore, the uſing ſymbolical repreſentations being for the advantage of religion, why may they not be ordained of God?

A. If you muſt have recourſe to words, to explain the ſignification of ſuch ſymbols, are they not arbitrary marks, whoſe meaning cannot be known, but from words; and, not being capable of expreſſing things more fully than words, wholly needleſs as to that purpoſe? Nay, words themſelves being but arbitrary ſigns, to multiply ſuch ſigns needleſsly would be very abſurd.

As to ſenſible things making a deeper impreſſion on the common people, that, I preſume is a juſt reaſon againſt their uſe in religon; becauſe the vulgar, who generally look no farther than externals, do not uſe them barely, as they do words, to expreſs their meaning; but conceive in them, I know not what internal holineſs; and think ſuch ſymbolical repreſentations as neceſſary as the things repreſented by them; nay, by degrees, forgetting the reaſon of their inſtitution, come to idolize them, as the Iſraelites did the brazen ſerpent: And this the people have always done in all religions whatever, where theſe ſymbolical repreſentations have been uſed.

The chief cauſe of the Egyptians falling into groſſer idolatries than other leſs knowing nations, no doubt, owing to the uſe of hieroglyphics in their religious worſhip: An ox, that laborious and uſeful animal, was at firſt only a ſymbolical repreſentation; the meaning of which, the people in time forgetting, fell to down-right adoring the beaſt; and, perhaps, it was for the ſame reaſon that leeks and onions, and other garden-ſtuff came likewiſe to to be worſhipped. But without looking into the Pagan world, and ſhewing by what degrees they came to worſhip thoſe ſenſible repreſentations, ſtatues and images; whoever reflects on the uſe the Papiſts have made of ſuch things, muſt ſee how fatal it is to bring them into religion: The images and pictures of ſaints, and croſſes were firſt introduced, on pretence, that being ſenſible repreſentations, they might ſerve to excite people's devotion; but that end was ſoon forgotten, and the ſuperſtitious vulgar worſhipped the very images, pictures, and croſſes. I need not tell you what tranſubſtantiation, conſubſtantiation, real preſence, and

other abſurdities of that nature are owing to; and what miſchiefs they have occaſioned: But ſuppoſing ſuch ſymbolical repreſentations might be occaſionally uſed; is it not, for the reaſons already given, incumbent on the parties concerned, to appoint, alter, and very them as occaſion requires?

B. If God has delegated to the clergy a power to conſecrate perſons and things; can any, whether prince or people, diſpenſe with this power, and ſubſtitute things unconſecrated?

A. As God alone is abſolutely holy, ſo men may be ſaid to be more or leſs holy, according as they imitate him; and as his holineſs conſiſts in a good and pious diſpoſition of mind; ſo the actions of men are no otherwiſe holy, but as they flow from, and are ſigns of a holy diſpoſition. Inanimate things can only be ſaid to have a relative holineſs, as made uſe of in actions, by which men expreſs that holy diſpoſition of mind, and can laſt no longer than they are thus employed. What holineſs, either real or relative, would the ark now have? Tho' it once had ſuch a legal holineſs, that more than fifty thouſand reapers were deſtroyed for peeping into it.* Nay, perſons who want all real holineſs, may yet have a relative holineſs, as miniſters employed by the congregation about holy things; but this can be no more than a derivative holineſs, and can laſt no longer than the holy action they are about; and belongs equally to thoſe from whom it is derived. Thus all the relative holineſs which concerns public worſhip, whether as to perſons, places, or things, muſt be derived from the congregation; and nothing ſure can be more abſurd, than to imagine the clergy, by any form of words, can beſtow any permanent holineſs, whether real or relative, of timber, ſtone, &c. And therefore the method uſed by archbiſhop Laud, in conſecrating a church, was generally cried out on as profane, and tending to juſtify thoſe conſecrations uſed in the Greek and Latin churches, whereby they cheat the people of immenſe ſums

* 1 Samuel 6. 19.

But it is no wonder, if they who claim this power in relation to inanimate things, ſhould pretend to convey men, though ever ſo wicked, a real inherent, nay, indelible holy character; though wherein that conſiſts, they themſelves cannot tell. But,

What the prieſts aim at, by this cant, is to make people believe their prayers are of greater efficacy than thoſe of the unſanctified laity; very well knowing, that if the people were ſo weak as to believe it, they would be thought neceſſary on all occaſions eſpecially to perſons on their death-beds. What advantages they have made by being then thought thus neceſſary, no one can be ignorant of. I do not wonder, that ſo looſe an haranguer as St. Chryſoſtom ſhould ſay, "The prayers of the people, which are weak in themſelves, laying hold on the more prevailing prayers of the prieſts, may, by them, be conveyed to Heaven." But I admire, that the judicious biſhop Potter, the king's profeſſor of divinity at Oxford, ſhould maintain the ſame poſition, and think to ſupport it by his father's authority: But this is modeſt in compariſon of what Hickes, Brett, and others of that ſtamp, aſſign to prieſts; in ſuppoſing they have ſuch tranſcendent privileges by virtue of their indelible character, that they can bleſs or curſe authoritatively; nay, that their very prayers to God himſelf are authoritative prayers.

B. Though ſome have had too little regard for natural religion, as being too ſtubborn to yield to any ſelfiſh views; yet that will not juſtify you for levelling your arguments againſt the divine omnipotency. Are we not the creatures of God; and may not our creator give us what arbitrary commands he pleaſes?

A. Not to repeat what I have ſaid already, I ſhall only aſk you, Why may not God deceive us? Tell us one thing, and act the contrary? Is not his power abſolute? and his will who can reſiſt? Would you not reply, that God, as he is infinitely good and happy, can have no motive to deceive us? And that he could do whatever he thought fit for the good of his creatures, without having recourſe to ſuch mean ſhifts? And will not this

reaſon equally hinder him from burdening us with arbitrary commands? Is not one as much as the other, inconſiſtent with his wiſdom and goodneſs, by which his power is always directed? And of the two it ſhould ſeem leſs abſurd, that God might deceive for their good, than impoſe arbitrary things on them for their hurt; by annexing ſevere penalties on non-obſervance.

B. May not God give us arbitrary commands to try our obedience?

A. A man, who knows not the hearts of others, nor foreſees how they will act, may think it prudent to try people in things of little or no moment, before he truſts them in greater; but God, who fore-knows what men will do on all occaſions, can need no ſuch trial. If earthly kings, who may be deceived, and for the moſt part are ſo, would be juſtly eſteemed tyrants, if they require things of their ſubjects merely to try their obedience; how can we think this of the Omniſcient, infinitely glorious king of kings? Though was a trial neceſſary, moral and immoral things would be the moſt proper ſubjects for it; becauſe we cannot practice one, or refrain from the other, without ſubduing our luſts and paſſions: But what ſpeculative articles will not an ill man profeſs? Or what indifferent things will he not practiſe, to be indulged in any one darling vice?

And now do not you think we may juſtly conclude, that whatſoever God requires us to believe, or practiſe, is purely for our good; and conſequently, that no belief, or practice, which does not contribute to that good, can come from God; and therefore, as long as we adhere to what reaſon reveals to us concerning the goodneſs of God, by admitting every thing in religion which makes for the the good of man, and nothing that does not, we cannot miſtake our duty either to God or man.

And therefore I ſhall conclude this head with a quotation from a noble author: "To believe, that every thing is governed, ordered, or regulated for the beſt,

by a designing principle, or mind, necessarily good and permanent, is to be a perfect Theist.

"To believe no one supreme designing principle, or mind, but rather two, three, or more, (though in their nature good) is to be a Polytheist.

"To believe the governing mind, or minds, not absolutely and necessarily good, nor confined to what is best, but capable of acting according to mere will or fancy, is to be a Dæmonist."*

CHAP. XII

That they, who, to magnify revelation, weaken the force of the religion of reason and nature, strike at all religion; and there cannot be two independent rules for the government of human actions.

B. IN my opinion you lay too great a stress on fallible reason, and too little on infallible revelation; and therefore I must needs say, your arguing wholly from reason would make some of less candor than myself, take you for an errant free-thinker.

A. Whatever is true by reason, can never be false by revelation; and if God cannot be deceived himself, or be willing to deceive men, the light he hath given to distinguish between religious truth and falsehood, cannot, if duly attended to, deceive them in things of so great moment.

They who do not allow reason to judge in matters of opinion or speculation, are guilty of as great absurdity as the papists, who will not allow the senses to be judges in the case of transubstantiation, though a matter directly under their cognizance; nay the absurdity, I think, is

* Characteris. vol. 2 p. 15.

greater in the firſt caſe, becauſe reaſon is to judge whether our ſenſes are deceived: And if no texts ought to be admitted as a proof in a matter contrary to ſenſe, they ought certainly as little to be admitted in any point contrary to reaſon.

In a word, to ſuppoſe any thing in revelation inconſiſtent with reaſon, and, at the ſame time, pretend it to be the will of God, is not only to deſtroy that proof, on which we conclude it to be the will of God, but even the proof of the being of a God; ſince if our reaſoning faculties duly attended to can deceive us, we cannot be ſure of the truth of any one propoſition; but every thing would be alike uncertain, and we ſhould for ever fluctuate in a ſtate of univerſal ſcepticiſm: Which ſhews how abſurdly they act, who, on pretence of magnifying tradition, endeavor to weaken the force of reaſon, (though to be ſure they always except their own;) and thereby fooliſhly ſap the foundation to ſupport the ſuperſtructure; but as long as reaſon is againſt men, they will be againſt reaſon. We muſt not, therefore, be ſurprized, to ſee ſome endeavor to reaſon men out of their reaſon; though the very attempt to deſtroy reaſon by reaſon, is a demonſtration men have nothing but reaſon to truſt to.

And to ſuppoſe any thing can be true by revelation, which is falſe by reaſon, is not to ſupport that thing, but to undermine revelation; becauſe nothing unreaſonable, nay, what is not highly reaſonable, can come from a God of unlimited, univerſal, and eternal reaſon. As evident as this truth is, yet that ſhall not hinder me from examining in a proper place, whatever you can urge from revelation. And give me leave to add, that I ſhall not be ſurprized, if for ſo laudable an attempt, as reconciling reaſon and revelation, which have been ſo long ſet at variance, I ſhould be cenſured as a free-thinker; a title, that, however invidious it may ſeem, I am far from being aſhamed of; ſince one may as well ſuppoſe a man can reaſon without thinking at all, as reaſon well without thinking freely. But,

The irreconcilable enemies of reaſon ſeeing it too groſs, in this reaſoning age, to attack reaſon openly, do it covertly under the name of free-thinking; not deſpairing, but that the time may come again, when the laity ſhall ſtifle every thought riſing in their minds, though with ever ſo much appearance of truth, as a ſuggeſtion of ſatan, if it claſhes with the real, or pretended opinions of their prieſts.

B. Though you talk ſo much about reaſon, you have not defined what you mean by that word.

A. When we attribute any operation to it, as diſtinguiſhing between truth and falſehood, &c. we mean by it the rational faculties; but when we aſcribe no ſuch operation to it, as when we give a reaſon for a thing, &c. we then underſtand by it, any medium, by which our rational faculties judge of the agreement or diſagreement of the terms of any propoſition; and if an author writes intelligibly, we may eaſily diſcern in which of theſe two ſenſes he takes the word. But to go to the bottom of this matter;

It will be requiſite to give a more diſtinct account of reaſon in both theſe ſenſes. By the rational faculties then, we mean the natural ability a man has to apprehend, judge, and infer: The immediate objects of which faculties are, not the the things themſelves, but the ideas the mind conceives of them. While our ideas remain ſingle, they fall under the apprehenſion, and are expreſſed by ſingle terms; when joined, under the judgment, and expreſſed by propoſitions; when ſo joined as to need the intervention of ſome other idea to compare them with, in order to form a judgment, they become by that intervention, the ſubject of inference, or argumentation; and this is termed, ſyllogiſm or argument. It muſt be obſerved too, that all the ideas we have, or can have, are either by ſenſation or reflection; by the firſt, we have our ideas of what paſſes, or exiſts without; by the ſecond, of what paſſes, or exiſts within the mind: And in the view, or contemplation of theſe conſiſts all our knowledge; that

being nothing but the perception of the agreement, or disagreement of our ideas. And any two of these, when joined together, so as to be affirmed or denied of each other, make what we call a proposition; when considered apart, what we call the terms of that proposition; the agreement, or disagreement of which terms being expressed by the rightly affirming, or denying them of each other, is what we call truth; the perception of their agreement or disagreement, is what we term knowledge: This knowledge accrues either immediately on the bare intuition of these two ideas, or terms so joined, and is therefore styled intuitive knowledge; or self-evident truth; Or by the intervention of some other idea, or ideas, as a common measure for the other two; and is therefore called the medium, by which reason judges of their agreement or disagreement; and this is called demonstrative knowledge, which is never to be had without the help of the other. For,

If there were not some propositions which need not to be proved, it would be in vain for men to argue with one another; because they then could bring no proofs but what needed to be proved.—Those propositions which need no proof, we call self-evident; because by comparing the ideas, signified by the terms of such propositions, we immediately discern their agreement, or disagreement: This is, as I said before, what we call intuitive knowledge, and is the knowledge of God himself, who sees all things by intuition; and may, I think, be called divine inspiration; as being immediately from God, and not acquired by any human deduction, or drawing of consequences: This, certainly, is that divine, that uniform light, which shines in the minds of all men, and enables them to discern whatever they do discern; since without it there could be no demonstration, no knowledge, but invincible obscurity, and universal uncertainty.

Where a proposition cannot be made evident, by comparing the two ideas or terms of it with each other,

it is rendered ſo by intermediate ideas or terms; whereby the agreement, or diſagreement of the ideas under examination, or the truth of that propoſition is perceived; and when there is an intuitive perception of the agreement, or diſagreement of the intermediate ideas in each ſtep of the progreſſion, then, and not till then, it becomes demonſtrative knowledge; otherwiſe it can riſe no higher than probability, which conſiſts not in a certain, but a likely connection between the terms of a propoſition, and the intermediate proofs of it: So that every propoſition that is only probable, muſt have a proportionable degree of uncertainty, otherwiſe it would amount to demonſtration; and conſequently, probability, as well as certainty, is founded on the relation it has to ſelf-evident truths; becauſe where no relation of any ſort can be diſcovered, there is no room for certainty or probability.

Hence we ſee that all wrong reaſoning is the effect of raſhneſs, and conſiſts either in taking propoſitions to have a certain connexion with ſelf-evident truths, when they have but a probable one; or imagining there is a probable connexion, when there is no connexion at all; or elſe miſtaking the degrees of probability.

B. The quakers are very poſitive, that there is in all mankind, a principle of action diſtinct from reaſon, (and which is not inſpiration) by which all are to be governed in matters of religion, as they are by reaſon in other matters; and which they commonly call the light within.

A. Was there any ſuch principle, men deſtitute of all reaſon were as capable of knowing all matters of religion, as if they had been ever ſo rational. It is ſtrange, that all mankind ſhould have a principle of acting, of which they never were ſenſible; nor can theſe modern diſcoverers tell them what it is, or how it operates; nor do they themſelves ever uſe it in any of their debates about religion; but argue like other men from principles that are in common to all

mankind, and prove propoſitions that are not ſelf-evident by thoſe that are ſo; and confute falſe aml bad reaſons (of which they can only judge by reaſon) by true and good reaſons; which ſuppoſes that reaſon, however fallible it may be, is all rational creatures have to truſt to; and that it is the higheſt commendation of religion, that it a reaſonable ſervice. And ſince this is an age, where words without meaning, or diſtinctions without difference, will not paſs current; why ſhould they, who otherwiſe appear to have good ſenſe, thus impoſe on themſelves, and be expoſed to others, for ſuch ſenſeleſs notions, as can only ſerve to prejudice people againſt their other rational principles? But it is the fate of moſt ſects to be fondeſt of their uglieſt brats. But not to deviate,

Were it not for thoſe ſelf-evident notions, which are the foundation of all our reaſonings, there could be no intellectual communication between God and man; nor, as we are framed, can God aſcertain us of any truth, but by ſhewing its agreement with thoſe ſelf-evident notions, which are the teſts by which we are to judge of every thing, even the being of God and natural religion; which, though not knowable by intuition, are to be demonſtrated by proofs, which have, mediately or immediately, a neceſſary connection with our ſelf-evident notions. And therefore to weaken the force of demonſtration, is to ſtrike at all religion, and even the being of God; and not give probably its due weight, is to ſtrike at the authority of that revelation you contend for; becauſe, that God revealed his will by viſions, dreams, trances, or any other way beſides the light of nature, can only come under the head of probability. And,

If it be but probable, that God made any external revelation at all, it can be but probable, though perhaps, not in the ſame degree of probability, that he made this, or that revelation: And this evidence all pretend to, ſince, perhaps, there never was a time or place, where ſome external revelation was not believed, and

its votaries equally confident, that theirs was a true revelation: And, indeed, the prodigious numbers of revelations, which from time to time have been in the world, ſhew how eaſily mankind may in this point be impoſed on. And as there can be no demonſtration of the revelation itſelf, ſo neither can there be any of its conveyance to poſterity; much leſs that this, or that, has been conveyed intire to diſtant times and places; eſpecially, if the revelation be of any bulk; and which may have gone through the hands of men, who, not only in the dark ages of the church, but even in the beginning, if we judge by the number of corrupted paſſages, and even forged books, were capable of any pious fraud. Nay, the very nature of probability is ſuch, that were it only left to time itſelf, even that would wear it quite out; at leaſt if it be true what mathematicians pretend to demonſtrate, viz. that the probability of facts depending on human teſtimony, muſt gradually leſſen in proportion to the diſtance of the time when they were done. And we have a reverend divine, who has publiſhed, as he thinks, a demonſtration of this, with relation to facts recorded in ſcripture; and has gone ſo far as to fix the preciſe time, when all probability of the truth of the hiſtory of Chriſt, will be entirely ſpent, and exhauſted.

Archbiſhop Laud ſays, that "the aſſent we yield to this main point of divinity, that the ſcripture is the word of God, is grounded on no compelling or demonſtrative ratiocination, but relies on the ſtrength of faith more than any one principle whatever." And by the confeſſion of the beſt proteſtant writers, the internal excellency of the Chriſtian doctrines is the main proof of their coming from God; and therefore, Mr. Chillingworth ſays, "For my part, I profeſs, if the doctrine of the ſcripture was not as good, and as fit to come from God, the fountain of goodneſs, as the miracles, by which it was confirmed, were great; I ſhould want one main pillar of my faith: And for want of it, I fear, ſhould be much ſtaggered in it."

This, I think, may be sufficient to shew, what a folly they are guilty of, who, in order to advance the credit of revelation, endeavor to weaken the force of reason.

B. I do not think we ought to have the same regard for reason as men had formerly; when that was the sole rule God had given them for the government of their actions; since now we Christians have two supreme, independent rules, reason and revelation; and both require an absolute obedience.

A. I cannot see how that is possible; for if you are to be governed by the latter, that supposes you must take every think on trust; or merely because it is said by those, for whose dictates you are to have an implicit faith: For to examine into the truth of what they say, is renouncing their authority; as on the contrary, if men are to be governed by their reason, they are not to admit any thing farther than as they see it reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take, and not to take, things on trust.

To receive religion on the account of authority supposes, that if the authority promulgated a different religion, we should be obliged to receive it; and indeed, it is an odd jumble, to prove the truth of a book by the doctrines it contains, and at the same time, conclude those doctrines to be true, because contained in that book; and yet this is a jumble every one makes, who contends for men's being absolutely governed both by reason and authority.

What can be a fuller evidence of the sovereignty of reason, than that all men, when there is any thing in their traditional religion, which in its literal sense cannot be defended by reason, have recourse to any method of interpretation, though ever so forced, in order to make it appear reasonable. And do not all parties, when pressed, as they are all in their turns, say with Tertullian, "We ought to interpret scripture, not by the sound of words, but by the nature of things?" *Malo te ad sensum rei, quam ad sonum vocabuli exercear.* But

ſometimes the letter of the ſcripture is ſuch an authority, as cannot be parted with without ſacrilege; and ſometimes it is a letter which killeth.

In a word, when men, in defending their own, or attacking other traditionary religions, have recourſe to the nature or reaſon of things; does not that ſhew, they believe the truth of all traditionary religions is to be tried by it; as being that, which muſt tell them what is true or falſe in religion? And were there not ſome truths relating to religion of themſelves ſo evident, as that all muſt agree in them, nothing relating to religion could be proved, every thing would want a farther proof; and if there are ſuch evident truths, muſt not all others be tried by their agreement with them? And are not theſe the teſts, by which we are to diſtinguiſh the only true religion from the many falſe ones? And do not all parties alike own, there are ſuch teſts drawn from the nature of things, each crying their religion contains every things worthy, and nothing unworthy of having God for its author; thereby confeſſing that reaſon enables them to tell what is worthy of having God for its Author. And if reaſon tells them this, does it not tell them every thing that God can be ſuppoſed to require?

In ſhort, nothing can be more certain, than that there are ſome things in their own nature good, ſome evil; and others neither good nor evil; and for the ſame reaſon God commands the good, and forbids the evil, he leaves men at liberty in things indifferent; it being inconſiſtent with his wiſdom to reward the obſervance of ſuch things; and with his goodneſs to puniſh for not obſerving them. And as he could have no end in creating mankind, but their common good; ſo they anſwer the end of their creation, who do all the good they can: And to enable men to do this, God has given them reaſon to diſtinguiſh good from evil, uſeful from uſeleſs things: or in other words, has made them moral agents, capable of diſcerning the relations they ſtand in to God and one another; and the duties reſulting from theſe relations, ſo neceſſary to their common

good: And consequently, religion, thus founded on these immutable relations, must at all times, and in all places, be alike immutable; since external revelation, not being able to make any change in these relations, the duties that necessarily result from them, can only recommend, and inculcate these duties; except we suppose, that God at last acted the tyrant, and imposed such commands, as the relations we stand in to him, and one another, no ways require.

To imagine any external revelation not to depend on the reason of things, is to make things give place to words; and implies, that from the time this rule commenced, we are forbid to act as moral agents, in judging what is good or evil; fit, or unfit; and that we are to make no other use of our reason, than to see what is the literal meaning of the texts; and to admit that only to be the will of God, though ever so inconsistent with the light of nature, and the eternal reason of things. Is not this to infer, there is nothing good or evil in itself, but that all depends on the will of an arbitrary being; which, though it may change every moment, is to be unalterably found in such a book? And,

All divines, I think, now agree in owning, that there is a law of reason, antecedent to any external revelation, that God cannot dispense, either with his creatures or himself, for not observing; and that no external revelation can be true, that in the least circumstance, or minutest point, is inconsistent with it. If so, how can we affirm any one thing in revelation to be true, until we perceive, by that understanding, which God hath given us to discern the truth of things; whether it agrees with this immutable law, or not?

If we cannot believe otherwise than as things appear to our understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our understandings (a matter we cannot know but by using our understanding) to any authority whatever, is to suppose he requires impossibilities. And our self-evident notions being the foundation of all certainty, we can only judge of things, as they are found to

be more or leſs agreeable to them; to deny this on any pretence whatever, can ſerve only to introduce an univerſal ſcepticiſm. And therefore, biſhop Taylor obſerves, "It is reaſon that is the judge; and fathers, councils, tradition and ſcripture the evidence." And if reaſon be the judge, can it form a right judgment, without examining into every thing which offers itſelf for evidence? And would it not examine in vain, if it had not certain teſts, by which it could try all evidences relating to religious matters.

B. Though reaſon may be the judge; yet the ſcripture, we ſay, is the rule, by which reaſon muſt judge of the truth of things.

A. If it be ſuch a rule, muſt it not have all the qualifications neceſſary to make it ſo? But if reaſon muſt tell us what thoſe qualifications are, and whether they are to be found in ſcripture; and if one of thoſe qualifications is, that the ſcripture muſt be agreeable to the nature of things; does not that ſuppoſe the nature of things to be the ſtanding rule, by which we muſt judge of the truth of all thoſe doctrines contained in the ſcriptures? So that the ſcripture can only be a ſecondary rule, as far as it is found agreeable to the nature of things; or to thoſe ſelf-evident notions, which are the foundation of all knowledge and certainty.

In ſhort, no man can any more diſcern the objects of his own underſtanding, and their relations, by the faculties of another, than he can ſee with the eyes of another; or that one ſhip can be guided by the helm of another: And therefore, he, who demands the aſſent of a man to any thing, without conveying into his mind ſuch reaſons as may produce a ſenſe of the truth of it; erects a tyranny over his underſtanding, and demands an impoſſible tribute. No opinion, though ever ſo certain to one man, can be infuſed into another as certain, by any method, but by opening his underſtanding, ſo that he may find the reaſonableneſs of it in his own mind; and conſequently, the only criterion, by which he tries his own reaſonings, muſt be the internal evidence he

has already of certain truths, and the agreeableneſs of his inferences to them. And,

To ſuppoſe a creature to have reaſon to direct him, and that he is not to be directed by it, is a contradiction; and if we are religious as we are rational, can religion oblige us not to be governed by reaſon, though but for a moment? Nay, what is the religion of all rational beings, but what the ſcripture terms it, a reaſonable ſervice? Or, their reaſon employed on ſuch ſubjects, as conduce to the dignity of the rational nature? So that religion and reaſon were not only given for the ſame end, the good of mankind; but they are, as far as ſuch ſubjects extend, the ſame, and commence together. And if God can no otherwiſe apply to men, but by applying to their reaſon, (which he is continually doing by the light of nature) does he not by that bid them uſe their reaſon? And can God at the ſame time forbid it, by requiring an implicit faith in any perſon whatever?

If you allow, that men by their reaſoning faculties are made alike unto God, and framed after his image; and that reaſon is the moſt excellent gift God can beſtow; do they not deſtroy this likeneſs, deface this image, and give up the dignity of human nature, when they give up their reaſon to any people whatever?

Can we lay too great a ſtreſs on reaſon, when we conſider, it is only by virtue of it God can hold communication with man? Nor can otherwiſe, if I may ſo ſpeak, witneſs for himſelf, or aſſert the wiſdom and goodneſs of his conduct; than by ſubmitting his ways to the cool deliberation of men, and ſtrict examination; ſince it is from the marks we diſcern in the laws of the univerſe, and its government, that we can demonſtrate it to be governed by a God of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs: He, whoſe reaſon does not enable him to do this, can neither diſcern the wiſdom, goodneſs, or even the being of a God.

They only anſwer the end for which their reaſon was given them, who judge of the will of God, by the reaſonableneſs and goodneſs of doctrines; and think his

laws, like his works, carry in them the marks of divinity; and they likewiſe do the greateſt honor to the ſcripture, who ſuppoſe it deals with men as with rational creatures; and therefore admit not of any its doctrines without a ſtrict examination: And thoſe who take a contrary method, would, if they lived in Turky, embrace Mahometaniſm, and believe in the Alcoran.

And indeed, a blind ſubmiſſion is ſo far from doing credit to true religion, that it puts all religion on the ſame foot; for without judging of a religion by its internal marks, there is nothing but miracles to plead; and miracles true or falſe, if they are believed (and where are they not?) will have the ſame effect: Nay, if miracles can be performed by evil, as well as by good beings, the worſt religion may have the moſt miracles, as needing them moſt. And it was a proverbial ſaying among the philoſophers of Greece, THAUMANA MOROIS miraclesfor fools, and reaſons for wiſe men. The Bæotians were remarkable for their ſtupidity, and the number of their oracles; and if they look no further than the chriſtian world, you will find, that ignorance, and the belief of daily miracles go hand in hand; and that their is nothing too abſurd for the people's belief. And if the moſt learned Huetius gives us a true account of things, there are no miracles recorded in the bible, but many of the like nature are to be found in Pagan hiſtories.

Would not Chriſtians themſelves, think it a ſufficient proof of a religion's not coming from God, if it wanted any of thoſe internal marks, by which the truth of religion is to be tried, without inquiring into its miracles, or any other its external proofs? and conſequently, wherever theſe internal marks are found, are not external marks needleſs? But,

How can we maintain, that the ſcripture carries with it all thoſe internal marks of truth, which are inſeparable from the laws of God; and at the ſame time affirm, it requires an implicit faith, and blind obedience to all its dictates? If it does ſo, how could we have imagined whether it had thoſe internal marks? Or can we ſay, we

cannot know without the ſcripture, what are the internal marks of truth; and at the ſame time ſuppoſe, we muſt by our reaſon know what are thoſe marks, before we can tell whether they are to be found in the ſcripture?

If our nature is a rational nature, and our religion a reaſonable ſervice, there muſt be ſuch a neceſſary, and cloſe connexion between them, as to leave no room for any thing that is arbitrary to intervene: And conſequently, the religion of all rational beings muſt conſiſt, in uſing ſuch a conduct to God, and their fellow-creatures, as reaſon, whatever circumſtance they are in, does direct.

We find St. Paul himſelf ſaying, that though we, (the apoſtles) or an angel from Heaven, preach any other goſpel, let him be accurſed:* And is not laying the whole ſtreſs on its internal marks? Since there is nothing in the nature of ſuch things as have not thoſe marks, to hinder them from being changed every moment.

And as to thoſe who depreſs reaſon, in order to exalt revelation, I would aſk them; what greater proof the ſcripture can give us of the rectitude of human underſtanding in religious matters, than calling it the inſpiration of the aimighty;† or than God's frequently appealing to it, for the juſtification of his own conduct?

In the prophet Iſaiah, God repreſenting his own conduct towards his people, under the parable of a vineyard, expreſsly ſays, O ye inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.‡ And in Ezekial, God, after a long vindication of his carriage towards his people, appeals to them, ſaying, hear now, O houſe of Iſrael, is not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?§ And in the prophet Micha, he ſays, He will plead with them; aſks what he has done, and bids them teſtify againſt him.‖ And in the prophet Iſaiah, after the Lord had ſaid,

* Gal. i. 8. † Job xxxii. 8. ‡ Iſa. v. 3. § Ezek. xviii. 25. ‖ Mich. vi. 2. 3.

Wash ye, make ye clean, put away the the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; he adds, come now, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.* Does not God here appeal to their reason for the sufficiency of moral things, to wash away their sins, though of the deepest dye? And could God and man reason together, except there were some notions in common to both; some foundation for such reasoning? Otherwise could Job say, I desire to reason with God?† And certainly, the next thing to reasoning with God, is reasoning with one another about God and religion; that being the chief end, for which our reason was given us. Thus Paul reasoned in the syngogue every Sabbath. And again, he reasoned with them out of the scriptures. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled;‡ Which, certainly, he had never done, had Paul talked about types, allegories, rites and ceremonies, &c.

B. You argue as if we had no certain way of knowing the will of God, except from the light of nature, and that eternal rule of reason, by which you suppose, God governs all his own actions, and expects men should govern all theirs; but may not God take what methods he pleases to communicate his mind?

A. This all traditional religions with equal confidence, assert; and they would have equal right to plead it, if reason did not afford men certain criteria to know the will of God by, which way soever revealed.

If God created mankind to make them happy here, or hereafter, the rules he gave them, must be sufficient to answer that benevolent purpose of infinite wisdom; and consequently, had mankind observed them, there could have been no occasion for an external revela-

* Isa. i. 16, 18. † Job xiii. 3. ‡ Acts xviii. 4. c. xvii. 2. c. xxiv. 25.

tion; and its great uſe now is, to make men obſerve thoſe neglected rules, which God, of his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, deſigned for their preſent, and future happineſs.

B. Do not our Divines ſay, mankind were for many ages in a deplorable ſtate, for want of an external revelation?

A. If God does every thing that is fit for him to do, could men be in ſuch a ſtate, becauſe God did not do a thing, which was not fit for him to do, viz. make a revelation, before it was fit for him to make it? Or can the greateſt part of mankind be now in that deplorable condition, for want of a revelation, which God, out of his infinite wiſdom, has not as yet thought fit to communicate to them; at leaſt with that evidence, as is neceſſary to make them believe it?

Muſt not theſe gentlemen ſuppoſe, that either God, in creating mankind, did not deſign their future happineſs, though he gave them immortal ſouls capable of it; or elſe, that though he deſigned it, he preſcribed them ſuch means, or gave them ſuch rules, as either were not ſufficient at firſt; or in proceſs of time became inſufficient for that end? But that after men had been, for many ages, in this miſerable condition, God thought fit to mend the eternal, univerſal law of nature, by adding certain obſervances to it, not founded on the reaſon of things; and that thoſe, out of his partial goodneſs, he communicated only to ſome; leaving the greateſt part in their former dark and deplorable ſtate? But,

Is it not incumbent on thoſe, who make any external revelation ſo neceſſary to the happineſs of all mankind, to ſhew, how it is conſiſtent with the notion of God's being univerſally benevolent, not to have revealed it to all his children, when all had equal need of it? Was it not as eaſy for him to have communicated it to all nations, as to any one nation, or perſon? Or in all languages, as in any one? Nay was it not as eaſy for him to have made all men, for the ſake of this noble end, ſpeak in one and the ſame language; as it was at firſt,

to multiply languages, to prevent their building a tower up to Heaven? Nay, I ſee not how God can have any need at all of language, to let mankind know his will; ſince he has at all times communicated his mind to them without it.

B. Theſe, I confeſs, are conſiderable difficulties; but as to the laſt difficulty, did not God give laws to the Jews, of which other nations knew nothing?

A. Nor were they concerned to know, or when known, obliged to obſerve them; nor did they bind the Jews themſelves, for a time; and even then, they were for the moſt part impracticable out of the land of Canaan; where God, as I ſhall fully ſhew hereafter, acted not as governor of the univerſe, but king of the Jews, by virtue of the Horeb covenant; which he obtained at his own requeſt. But when God acts as governor of the univerſe, his laws are all alike deſigned for all under his government; that is, all mankind: And conſequently, what equally concerns all, muſt be equally knowable by all. And if the univerſality of a law, be the only certain mark of its coming from the governor of mankind; how can we be certain, that, which wants this mark comes from him? And if religion belongs to us, as we are men; muſt we not, as men, be capable of knowing it? And if all mankind are creatures of the ſame creator, and fellow-creatures with one another, muſt not all their religious duties, as they are creatures of the ſame God, and fellow-creatures with one another, be the ſame? And let me add, that

If men are religious, as they are rational; muſt they not be capable, when they come to the uſe of their reaſon, of knowing a religion founded on reaſon? Or muſt they be obliged to leave their country, and endleſsly rove up and down, in ſearch of ſuch opinions as have no foundation in reaſon? Or, if they are forced to ſtay at home, be ever examining into all the arbitrary precepts, which are to be met with in any of the traditional religions they can come at? And ſhould they do ſo, muſt they not, ſince reaſon could not direct them in

things not depending on reaſon, perpetually remain in a ſtate of uncertainty?

I might go farther, and aſk you, whether it is conſiſtent with that impartiality, which is eſſential to the Deity, not to make thoſe, he deſigns ſhould know his will by revelation, capable of knowing that revelation; and conſequently his will, contained in it, at one time as well as another? Which could not be, if that which was plain at firſt, became obſcure by reaſon of the change of languages, cuſtoms, the diſtance of time and place, the errors of tranſcribers and tranſlators, and an hundred other things too long to mention. Can theſe difficulties be avoided, without ſuppoſing, that religion, which way ſoever revealed, carries ſuch internal marks of truth, as at all times and places, plainly ſhews itſelf, even to the meaneſt capacity, to be the will of a being of univerſal and impartial benevolence.

B. The greater ſtreſs you lay on reaſon, the more you extol revelation? which being deſigned to exalt and perfect our rational nature, muſt be itſelf highly reaſonable.

A. I grant you this is the deſign of religion; but have not the Eccleſiaſtics in moſt places entirely defeated this deſign, and ſo far debaſed human nature, as to render it unſociable, fierce and cruel? Have they not made external revelation the pretence of filling the Chriſtian world with animoſity, hatred, perſecution, ruin and deſtruction; in order to get an abſolute dominion over the conſciences, properties and perſons of the laity? But paſſing over this, if the perfection of any nature, whether human, angelical, or divine, conſiſts in being governed by the law of its nature; and ours, in acting that part, for which we were created; by obſerving thoſe duties, which are founded on the relation we ſtand in to God and one another; can revelation any otherwiſe help to perfect human nature, but as it induces men to live up to this law of their nature? And if this law is the teſt of the perfection of any written law; muſt not

that be the moſt perfect law, by which the perfection of all others is to be tried? And,

If nothing but reaſoning can improve reaſoning, and no book can improve my reaſon in any point, but as it gives me convincing proofs of its reaſonableneſs; a revelation, that will not ſuffer us to judge of its dictates by our reaſon, is ſo far from improving reaſon, that it forbids the uſe of it; and reaſoning faculties unexerciſed, will have as little force, as unexerciſed limbs; he that is always carried, will at length become unable to go: "And if the holy ghoſt," as biſhop Taylor ſays, "works by heightening and improving our natural faculties;" it can only be by uſing ſuch means as will improve them, in propoſing reaſons and arguments to convince our underſtanding; which can only be improved, by ſtudying the nature and reaſon of things: I applied my heart (ſays the wiſeſt of men) to know, and to ſearch, and to ſeek out wiſdom, and the reaſon of things.*

So that the holy ghoſt cannot deal with men as rational creatures, but by propoſing arguments to convince their underſtandings, and influence their wills, in the ſame manner as if propoſed by other agents; for to go beyond this, would be making impreſſions on men, as a ſeal does on wax; to the confounding of their reaſon, and their liberty in chooſing; and the man would then be merely paſſive, and the action would be the action of another being acting upon him; for which he could be no way accountable: But if the holy ghoſt does not act thus, and revelation itſelf be not arbitrary; muſt it not be founded on the reaſon of things? and conſequently, be a republication, or reſtoration of the religion of nature? And ſince that takes in every thing thus founded, all the help any authority whatever can afford a reaſonable being, is the offering him arguments, of which his own reaſon muſt judge: And when he perceives their agreement with his ſelf-evident notions, it is then, and only then, he can be ſure of their truth. And

* Eccl. [illegible]

though men could not miſtake, as we ſee they daily do, a natural for a ſupernatual ſuggeſtion; yet whether that ſuggeſtion comes from a good or evil being, (continualy tempting people) can only be judged by the nature of the things ſuggeſted. For it is in vain to have recourſe to miracles, if evil as well as good beings had the power of doing them. And ſome are ſo heterodox as to imagine, one reaſon why evil beings are permitted to do miracles, is, leſt from the report of miracles (which is alike ſpread every where, and for every religion) men might be tempted not to rely on the reaſon and nature of things; and ſo run into endleſs ſuperſtitions. And,

God, in the old teſtament,* is ſaid to ſuffer miracles to be done by falſe prophets, in order to prove his people; and in the new, ſuch miracles as would, if it were poſſible, deceive the very elect.†

In ſhort, revelation either bids, or forbids men to uſe their reaſon, in judging of all religious matters; if the former, then it only declares that to be our duty, which was ſo independent of, and antecedent to revelation; if the latter, then it does not deal with men as with rational creatures; but deprives them of that ineſtimable bleſſing.

B. Who, I pray, maintains that revelation forbids us the uſe of our reaſon, in judging the truth of any religious matters?

A. Is not every one of this opinion, that ſays, we are not to read the ſcripture with freedom of aſſenting, or diſſenting, juſt as we judge it agrees, or diſagrees with the light of nature, and the reaſon of things? And this, one would think, none could deny was abſolutely neceſſary in reading a book, where it is owned the letter killeth. Nay, do not all in effect own as much, who will not allow the ſcripture any meaning, how plain ſoever, but what is agreeable to their reaſon? Which ſhews, that in their opinion, reaſon was rather given to ſupply the defects of revelation, than revelation the de-

* Deut. xiii. 1, 3. † Mat. xxiv. 24.

fects of reaſon. Is there a divine, who, though he pretends ever ſo high a veneration for the ſcripture, but will own there are many places, where it is neceſſary to recede from the letter, and find out a ſenſe agreeable to his reaſon; which ſuppoſes it is that, and not the authority of the book, for that is the ſame in both caſes, which makes him approve the literal ſenſe in one caſe, and condemn it in another. And were men not governed by their reaſon, but by ſome external revelation, they had nothing more to do, but to take the words of that revelation, in its literal, obvious, and plain meaning, how abſurd ſoever it might appear to their carnal reaſon.

B. We may take the words of fallible men in the plain, literal ſenſe; but if any thing is ſaid by infallible men, which in the obvious meaning of the words is inconſiſtent with reaſon, we muſt have recourſe to an allegorical ſenſe; or if that will not do, we muſt put no meaning at all on the words: thus we ſupport the dignity of both revelation and reaſon.

A. Is not this owning you take not your religion from thoſe infallible men, but you endeavor to impoſe that religion your reaſon tells you is true, upon their words; by allowing them no other meaning, how plain ſoever, but what you antecedently know by the light of nature to be the will of God? And,

There is no book, but you may own its infallibility, and yet be entirely governed by your reaſon, if you, as often as you find any thing not agreeable to your reaſon, torture it, to make it ſpeak what is ſo. Would you think a Mahometan was governed by his alchoran, who, upon all occaſions, ſhould thus depart from the literal ſenſe; nay, would you not tell him, that his inſpired book fell infinitely ſhort of Cicero's uninſpired writings; where there is no ſuch occaſion to recede from the letter?

The Moammorites, a famous ſect among the Mahometans, and the Myſticks, very numerous in Turkey, ſenſible of the difficulties and uncertainties that attend all traditional facts, maintain, that "God can never diſcover himſelf with certainty any other way, than by

ſpeaking to the reaſon and underſtanding of men; for if we depend," ſay they, "on oral tradition, we lay ourſelves open to the greateſt falſities and impoſitions; there being nothing ſo liable to infinite changes and alterations; numberleſs miſtakes, additions and ſubtractions, according as the opinions of men vary by the change of times and circumſtances: nor are books more exempt from ſuch doubtfulneſs and uncertainty; ſince we find ſo much diſagreement among books wrote by different men, in different parts and different ages; and even among the different books of the ſame men. But ſuppoſe," continue they, "we ſhould reſolve our whole faith into the ſole text of the alchoran, the difficulty and uncertainty will ſtill remain; if we conſider, how many metaphors and allegories, and other figures of ſpeech; how many obſcure, ambiguous, intricate and myſterious paſſages are to be met with in this infallible book; and and how different are the opinions, expoſitions and interpretations of the moſt ſubtle doctors, and learned commentators on every one of them. The only ſure way, then," add they, "to come to the certain knowledge of the truth, is to conſult God himſelf, wait his inſpirations, live juſt and honeſt lives, be kind and beneficent to all our fellow-creatures, and pity ſuch as differ from us in their opinions about the authority, integrity, and meaning of the alchoran.

The Mahometans, though they own the law of Chriſt, yet they make it of no uſe, becauſe they ſuppoſe the law of Mahomet is more perfect; and it is that they muſt ſtick to: and do not ſome men, by arguing much after the ſame manner in relation to the goſpel, render the law of nature uſeleſs? but if we are ſtill moral agents, and as ſuch are capable of judging between religion and ſuperſtition; can we think otherwiſe of the goſpel than that it is deſigned, not to free us from the eternal law of nature, but from thoſe abſurdities, which the folly or knavery of men have introduced in oppoſition to it? Hence it is, that the ſcripture ſpeaks in general terms, without defining thoſe things which it commands, or for

bids; becauſe it ſuppoſes men moral agents, capable by their reaſon to diſcern good from evil, virtue from vice, religion from ſuperſtition.

If Mr. Locke reaſons juſtly, "no miſſion can be looked on to be divine, that delivers any thing derogating from the honor of the one only true inviſible God; or inconſiſtent with natural religion and the rules of morality; becauſe God having diſcovered to men the unity and majeſty of his eternal Godhead, and the truths of natural religion and morality by the light of reaſon, he cannot be ſuppoſed to back the contrary by revelation; for that would be to deſtroy the evidence and uſe of reaſon, without which men cannot be able to diſtinguiſh divine revelation from diabolical impoſture."

Does not this ſuppoſe, firſt, that no miſſion can be divine, or its revelation true, that admits of more than one only true inviſible God? Secondly, that men, by their reaſon muſt know, wherein the honor of this one only, true, inviſible God conſiſts; otherwiſe they might (for aught they know) be obliged by revelation to admit what is derogatory to his honor? Thirdly, they muſt know by the light of reaſon, what are the truths of natural religion and rules of morality; becauſe otherwiſe they might be obliged to admit things inconſiſtent with them; and that to ſuppoſe the contrary, would be to deſtroy the uſe and evidence of reaſon, without which, men would not be able to diſtinguiſh divine revelation from diabolical impoſture; which implies, that in things tending to the honor of God, and the good of mankind, the dernier reſort is to reaſon; whoſe dictates, as they need no miracles for their ſupport, ſo all doctrines inconſiſtent with them, though they plead endleſs miracles, muſt be looked upon as diabolical impoſtures.

When the apoſtle ſays, whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, think on theſe things:*

* Phil. 4. 8.

is not this referring us to the light of nature, to know what these things are, which shew themselves to be the will of God by their internal excellency?

B. Our divines, though they own reason may do tolerably well in things between man and man, yet in matters relating to God, reason, they say, must submit to faith; and that the chief end of revelation is to give men, especially the common people, just conceptions, and right notions of the nature and perfections of God; which they could never have from the dim light of nature, without the help of revelation.

A. Though they argue thus, yet at the same time they find themselves obliged to own, that the scripture, when taken literally, gives the vulgar false and unworthy notions of the divine nature; by imputing, almost every where, to God, not only human parts, but human weakness and imperfections; and even the worst of human passions. To this, indeed, they have two answers, which seem inconsistent: first, that it is necessary to accommodate things in some measure to the gross conceptions of the vulgar. The other is, that reason has given all men such just conceptions of the divine nature, that there is no danger that even the common people should take these expressions literally.

B. Though reason, on which you lay such stress, may demonstrate, that there are not more Gods than one; yet reason can never tell us, that there is more than one that is God: though reason tells us, that there are not three Gods, yet reason could never tell us, that, though in the idea of a divine person, the idea of God be included, each person being by himself God; yet the multiplying of divine persons, was not the multiplying of Gods? And though reason declares there is difference between three and one; yet reason will never discover, that there is no more in three persons, than in one; all three together being the same numerical God, as each is by himself. Reason will never be able to find out a middle between a numerical, and specific unity; between one in number and one in kind.; and yet without it, how can we suppose

the ſame God to be ſelf exiſtent, and not ſelf-exiſtent, &c. Reaſon can as little diſcover a medium between a nominal, and a real difference; and yet without it how can we avoid Sabellianiſm on the one hand, or Polytheiſm on the other? There is nothing reaſon tells us more plainly; than that God and a man are two diſtinct, intelligent perſons; but can reaſon tell us they may become one intelligent perſon, even while their perſonal natures and properties remain infinitely diſtinct and different? Thus you ſee, how reaſon muſt ſubmit to faith.

A. I, for my part, not underſtanding theſe orthodox paradoxes, can only at preſent ſay, I do not diſbelieve them; but muſt add, that as I am a rational creature, and God requires of me a reaſonable ſervice, I ought not, nay, I cannot, have any faith, which will not bear the teſt of reaſon; and therefore, notwithſtanding your maxim of reaſon's ſubmitting to faith, I will venture to affirm, if a book aſſert (ſuppoſing the words of it are taken in their plain literal ſenſe) immoral, or impious doctrines; and there are not in that book certain marks to tell us, where they are to be taken literally, and where figuratively; or, what is the figurative ſenſe; that men in theſe points are as much to be determined by their reaſon as if there was no ſuch book.

B. This, ſure, cannot be the caſe with relation to the ſcriptures.

A. I ſhall only tell you what the moſt celebrated fathers ſay on that head. Athanaſius ſays, "ſhould we underſtand a great part of the ſacred writ literally, we ſhould fall into the moſt enormous blaſphemies. St Cyril ſays much the ſame. St. Gregory the firſt ſays, "the ſcripture is not only dead, but deadly; for it written, the letter kills, but the ſpirit quickneth; and this is what the whole divine letter does." And in another place he compares them to beaſts who regard the letter. And St. Jerome ſays, "If we adhere to the fleſh of the letter, it will be the occaſion of many evils." And Gregory Nyſſen makes the like reflection.

B. I durſt not have made ſo bold with the ſcriptures

as theſe fathers; but content myſelf in ſaying with the excellent biſhop of Litchfield, that "God, was he to ſpeak with men, muſt not only ſpeak their very language, but according to the conceptions of thoſe he ſpeaks to: To teſtify their ſentiments in natural, hiſtorical, or chronological matters; to mend their logic, or rhetoric when it is defective, but has no ill influence on piety, is not the buſineſs of revelation.——Needleſsly to contradict innocent vulgar notions, is the ſure way to loſe the peoples affections, and to forego a prudential way of gaining them."

A. With ſubmiſſion to this learned author, is their no difference between God's not rectifying men's ſentiments in thoſe matters, and uſing himſelf ſuch ſentiments as needs be rectified; or between God's not mending men's logic, or rhetoric, where it is defective, and uſing ſuch himſelf; or between God's not contradicting vulgar notions, and confirming them; by ſpeaking according to them? Or, can the God of truth ſtand in need of error to ſupport his truth; his eternal truth? Or, can infinite wiſdom deſpair of gaining, or keeping people's affections, without having recourſe to ſuch mean arts? No wonder, if men uſe pious frauds, when they think God himſelf has recourſe to them. In this caſe, muſt not men by their reaſon judge, when God makes uſe of defective logic, or rhetoric; and ſpeaks in natural, hiſtorical, and chronological matters, not according to the truth of things, but according to the conception of the vulgar, to whom he directs his ſpeech? Nor can I think of any falſehood, ſuppoſed to be authoriſed by the God of truth, but may be made uſe of to ſome ill purpoſe; in divinity, as well as mathematics it is a certain maxim, *uno abſurdo dato mille ſequentur.*

St. Auſtin argues after another manner, in ſaying, "Should unbelievers know us to be miſtaken in ſuch things as concern the natural world, and alledge our books for ſuch vain opinions; how ſhall they believe the ſame books, when they ſpeak of the reſurrection of the dead, and the world to come?

Dr. Prideaux, ſpeaking of the marks of impoſture, ſays, "If there be but one known truth in the whole ſcheme of nature, with which it interferes, this muſt make the diſcovery; and there is no man that forgeth an impoſture, but makes himſelf liable to be this way convicted of it." The Doctor, ſure, would not have aſſerted this ſo roundly, had he not compared the philoſophical, and ſcriptural ſcheme of nature, and perceived their exact agreement. But,

Not only Dr. Burnet, in defence of his Archæologia, but all, who maintain, that the ſun is immoveable, and that it is the earth that moves; ſufficiently ſhew, that the ſcriptural and philoſophical account of natural things ſeldom agree: However, to give one inſtance, there is ſcarce a country-man ſo ignorant, as not to know, that if the ſeed thrown into the earth is killed by drought, or dies by any other accident, it never riſes; but St. Paul (without regard to that judgment, which our ſaviour denounces againſt a man who calls his brother fool;) ſays, Thou fool, that which thou ſoweſt is not quickened, except it die:* And our ſaviour himſelf ſays, Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.† And the Greek church, to this day, make uſe of boiled corn at their commemoration of their dead, to ſignify the reſurrection of the body.

To convince you how entirely we are to depend on reaſon in matters of religion, I will only aſk you, why you ſuppoſe it ſo abſurd in the papiſts to ſay, that men bred up in their church, are obliged intirely to depend on its infallibility; and that they, who have not had the happineſs to be thus educated, ought indeed, to uſe their reaſon to bring them into their church; but that then they are no longer to be governed by it, but with the reſt of the members, equally to rely on the churches infallible deciſions.

* 1 Cor. xv. 36. † John xii. 24.

B. Becauſe this ſuppoſed infallibility puts it in the power of the church, to make their votaries believe virtue to be vice; and vice virtue; or any other abſurdity whatever; ſince they have no way to know, whether it does not require ſuch things, but by examining, by their reaſon, all her doctrines: and if reaſon be ſufficient to diſcover the being and will of God, and that their church holds no doctrines diſagreeable to his will, (for this they muſt own reaſon capable of diſcovering, before it could bring men into their church) they, in ſpite of their pretences to infallibility, put the whole ſtreſs on reaſon. And if afterwards, they teach men to renounce that reaſon, by which before they would have them wholly governed; it can be for no other cauſe, but to prevent their diſcovering in that church ſuch errors, as they could not well know before; and which, if known, would have hindered them from coming into it.

A, The papiſts, you know, reply, that if this reaſoning is good, it ſtrikes at all implicit faith in St. Peter, as well as his ſucceſſors; and equally concludes againſt men's giving up their reaſon to any perſons in former ages, as well as the preſent; ſince it is by that alone they are able to judge, whether their doctrines are conſiſtent with the light of nature, and free from ſuperſtition; and contain nothing in them unworthy a divine original: before examining what men teach, there is no reaſon to have an implicit faith in one ſet of men, more than another: and examination deſtroys all implicit faith, and all authority whatever; ſince if they then embrace the opinions of others, whether apoſtles or not, it is becauſe they appear agreeable to their reaſon. If you ſay the apoſtles would by reaſon bring men into their religion, and after that, have them wholly governed by their authority; may not the papiſts retort on you your own anſwer? and cry, "that if reaſon is ſufficient to diſcover the being and will of God, and that the apoſtles taught no doctrines, but what are agreeable to his will; (for this," ſay they, "you muſt allow reaſon capable of diſcovering, other-

wiſe it could never lead men to believe what the apoſtles taught;) you alike put the whole ſtreſs on reaſon. And you muſt own, either that men are entirely to be governed by reaſon, and then you deſtroy all authority whatever; or elſe not to be governed by it, and then you cannot, by reaſon, ſhew the abſurdity of that implicit faith the catholic church requires."

B. You know, that in anſwer to all objections of this nature, we ſay as biſhop Burnet does, in the expoſition of the articles of our church; "That if we obſerve the ſtile and method of the ſcriptures, we ſhall find in them all over a conſtant appeal to the reaſon of men, and to their intellectual faculties. If the mere dictates of the church, or of infallible men, had been the reſolution and foundation of faith, there had been no need of ſuch a long thread of reaſoning and diſcourſe, as both our ſaviour uſed when on earth, and the apoſtles uſed in their writings. We ſee the way of authority is not taken, but explanations are offered; proofs, and illuſtrations are brought, to convince the mind; which ſhews that God, in the cleareſt manifeſtation of his will, would deal with us as with rational creatures, who are not to believe, but on perſuaſion; and to uſe our reaſon in order to the attaining that perſuaſion."

A. This is all I contend for and had not what the biſhop ſays (though it amounts to giving up all implicit faith) been agreeable to the whole tenor of the ſcriptures, and the doctrines of our church; ſome of thoſe, who have ſo nicely examined into all parts of his expoſition of the articles, would never have let this paſſage eſcape without remarks. And therefore, ſince it is in defence of the proteſtant religion, and the whole current of ſcripture, I ſhall add to what this excellent father of the church has ſaid: that when any perſon has recourſe to arguments and reaſonings, he does, in thoſe inſtances, diſclaim all authority, and appeals to the reaſon of thoſe he means to perſuade; and in order to it, would have them judge of the force of his arguments, by thoſe common, and ſelf-evident notions, upon which the validity

of all proofs depend; and men, in examining what he says by that reason to which he appeals, wholly answer the end for which he argues with them; though upon examination, they are not convinced by his reasons. To require more, would be to require impossibilities; since it is not in the power of men, after they have considered things as well as they are able, to believe otherwise than they do. And had the apostles said to those they designed to convert; "it will be an affront to our infallibility, not to have an implicit faith in us; not to take on content whatever we say; you are, therefore, no longer to act as moral agents, or to have recourse to the essential difference of good and evil; to the light and law of nature, or to the eternal reason of things, to judge of the truth of what we declare. No, this is the faith, and thus you must believe, or perish everlastingly;"* had the apostles, I say, talked after this manner, do you think they could have gained one reasonable convert? No, they knew full well, that this was not the way to deal with rational creatures; they, on the contrary, as I shall fully shew hereafter, every where speak to this effect: "we desire you would, with the utmost freedom, examine our doctrines; since if they are, as we affirm, true, they will not only bear the test of reason, but the more they are tried, the brighter they will appear: This will be enobling yourselves, and doing justice to your own understandings, as well as to our doctrines."† If men have any authority, it is then only, when they renounce all peremptory authority; and instead of claiming dominion over the faith of men, desire they would prove every thing by those tests God had given them, in order to discern good from evil; truth from falsehood; religion from superstition. Thus the apostle seeks to maintain his credit and authority with the Thessalonians; prove all things, says he, hold fast that which is good.

B. Do not you, by laying such a stress on reason, in effect set aside revelation?

* 1 Thes. v. 21. † Acts xvii. 11.

A. No, if revelation be a reaſonable revelation, the greater ſtreſs we lay upon reaſon, the more we eſtabliſh revelation.

B. But not on the foot of its own authority.but only as you judge it agreeable to reaſon; and therefore I queſtion, whether any of our eminent divines talk thus in commendation of reaſon, to the diſparagement of authority.

A. If reaſon is all we rational creatures have to truſt to, being that alone which diſtinguiſhes us from brutes, incapable of religion; divines, even thoſe of the moſt narrow principles, however they may ſhuffle awhile, muſt make reaſon their dernier reſort: but however, ſince reaſon alone will not ſatisfy you, but you muſt have authority even againſt authority, I ſhall mention what ſome of our moſt eminent divines ſay, when they are defending revelation againſt the attacks of infidels; or writing againſt the papiſts, or men popiſhly affected.

Dr. J, Clarke, Dean of Sarum, in defending Chriſtianity againſt the attacks of infidels, who charge it with requiring an implicit faith, thinks this ſuch a ſcandal to chriſtianity, that a good part of his Boylean lectures are to clear it from that charge: "We find" ſays he "no command in ſcripture to lay aſide our reaſon or underſtanding; but directly the contrary is there affirmed of the chriſtian religion;* viz. that it is our reaſonable ſervice: and therefore the method in which Chriſt and his apoſtles taught this ſervice, was agreeable to reaſon; viz. by exhorting men to attend ſeriouſly,† to weigh diligently, their doctrines and precepts," &c. and then aſks, "are theſe, and ſuch like expreſſions, calculated to enſlave the underſtandings of men, and to induce a blind and implicit obedience? Such methods may ſerve the purpoſe of ſuperſtition, but true religion can gain nothing by them."

Dr. Whitchcot does this juſtice to external revelation, as to ſay, "The ſcripture's way of dealing with

* Rom. xii. 1. † Mat. xi. 15.

men in matters of religion, is always by evidence of reaſon and argument; and very judiciouſly adds, "I reckon, that which has not reaſon in it, or for it, is the ſuperſtition of man, and not religion of God's making." What an infinity of diſputes would this rule have cut off? What, I pray was the grand occaſion of ſo many monſtrous hereſies, even in the primitive times, but their believing the ſcripture's way of dealing with men, was not by evidence of reaſon? And if any now think otherwiſe, are they not in danger of making no better diſtinction between religion and ſuperſtition, than a modern philoſopher, who thus conciſely diſtinguiſhes them; tales publicly allowed, religion; diſallowed, ſuperſtition.

Biſhop Hoadley, the ſtrenous aſſerter of our religious, as well as civil rights, ſays, "Authority is the greateſt and moſt irreconcilable enemy to truth and argument, that this world ever furniſhed out; all the ſophiſtry; all the colour of plauſibility; all the artifice and cunning of the ſubtleſt diſputer in the world. may be laid open, and turned to the advantage of that very truth, which they deſigned to hide, or to depreſs: But againſt authority there is no defence." And after having ſhewn, that it was authority that cruſhed the noble ſentiments of Socrates, and others; and that it was by authority, that the Jews and heathens combated the truth of the goſpel; he ſays, "When chriſtians were increaſed to a majority, and came to think the ſame method to be the only proper one, for the advantage of their cauſe, which had been the enemy and deſtroyer of it; then, it was, the authority of chriſtians, which, by degrees, not only laid waſte the honor of chriſtianity, but well nigh extinguiſhed it among men.——It was authority which would have prevented all reformation, where it is; and which has put a barrier againſt it, wherever it was not. —How indeed, can it be expected, that the ſame thing, which has in all ages, and in all countries, been hurtful to truth, and true religion, amongſt men, ſhould in any age, or any country, become a friend and guardian of

them?" And to obviate an objection eaſily foreſeen, he adds, "It was authority, which hindered the voice of the ſon of God himſelf from being heard; and which alone ſtood in oppoſition to his powerful arguments, and his divine doctrine." Which ſuppoſes there is no chriſtian doctrine, but what has powerful arguments to ſupport it; or in other words, has divinity ſtamped on it, ſhewing itſelf by its innate excellency to be the will of God; ſince to put its credit on mere authority, is to put its credit on that, which has been, and always will be, an enemy to truth: Nay, he ſuppoſes, that were it poſſible, that authority and truth could conſiſt together, and the latter be received for the ſake of the former, it could not avail. His words are, "Where truth happens to be received for the ſake of authority; there is juſt ſo much diminiſhed from the love of truth, and the glory of reaſon, and the acceptableneſs of men to God; as there is attributed to authority." And

Archbiſhop Tillotſon ſays, "All our divine reaſonings about divine revelation are neceſſarily gathered by our natural notions about religion; and therefore, he, who ſincerely deſires to do the will of God, is not apt to be impoſed on by vain, and confident pretences of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be propoſed to him, which is pretended to come from God, he meaſures it by thoſe ſure, and ſteady notions, which he has of the divine nature and perfections; and by theſe he will eaſily diſcern, whether it be worthy of God or not, and likely to proceed from him: He will conſider the nature and tendency of it, or whether it be a doctrine according to godlineſs, ſuch as is agreeable to the divine nature and perfections, and tends to make us like unto God; if it be not, though an angel ſhould bring it, he would not receive it." And if no miracles, no, not the preaching of an angel, ought to make us receive any doctrine that does not carry thoſe internal marks; no miracles, certainly, ought to make us reject any doctrine that has theſe internal marks. And much to the ſame purpoſe, our judicous Doctor Claget ſays, "When

men pretend to work miracles, and talk of immediate revelations, of knowing the truth by inſpiration, and of more than ordinary illumination, we ought not to be frighted with thoſe big words, from looking what is under them; nor to be afraid of calling theſe things into queſtion, which are ſet off with high flown pretences. From hence it has come to paſs, that ſuperſtition and idolatry, enthuſiaſms and impoſtures have ſo much prevailed in the world. It is ſomewhat ſtrange, that we ſhould believe men the more, for that very reaſon upon which we ſhould believe them the leſs."

I ſhall give you the ſentiments of one judicious divine more, ſince they contain a ſummary of what I have been ſaying; his words are: "It could not be avoidable, but that this natural reverence for divine revelations, and pronenefs of believing them, would produce ſome ill effects, prejudicial to the reaſon and intereſt of mankind; a fatal credulity would creep into the world, and poſſeſs the minds of the more ignorant perſons, and induce them blindly to believe every bold pretender to revelation. After a laborious and fruitleſs ſearch of future happineſs, men were apt to embrace any ſyſtem of religion preſented to them; if it flattered their hopes of future felicity, they were loth to diſcover the error and illuſion of any pleaſing revelation; they wiſhed it might be true, and at firſt, what they wiſhed, they at laſt believed to be true.—Many feared they ſhould be injurious to the divine majeſty, and incur the guilt of atheiſm, if they ſhould ſcrupulouſly examine what pretended to carry the ſtamp of his authority, and to have been revealed by him. To entertain ſcruples in this caſe, was thought no leſs than ſacrilege, and every doubt was eſteemed an affront to God; to which may be added, that they ſhould contract no ſmall merit, and ever lay an obligation on God, if they immediately reſigned up their judgment to his ſuppoſed revelation, and blindly received it without any doubt or heſitation.

"This, in all ages, opened a wide gap, and prepared a way for error and ſuperſtition; while the whimſies of

every fooliſh enthuſiaſt, and the follies of every bold impoſtor were propoſed under the venerable name of divine oracles.——Hence all the abſurdities of the pagan religion found belief, and entertainment in the world; and for the moſt extravagant impoſtors never wanted proſelytes. Hence the moſt pernicious errors of heretics, found admiſſion into the church; and the pretence of new revelations ſeduced ſome part of the chriſtian world.

" To this fatal credulity, and danger of illuſion ariſing from it, God and nature have preſcribed an excellent remedy; the uſe of reaſon, which may examine the grounds and teſtimonies of all pretended revelations; enquire into their truth, and after a ſcrupulous trial, paſs ſentence on them. This, the intereſt of truth, and the honor of our nation requires us to perform, that we may neither proſtitute the former, nor depreciate the latter.—Without this precedent enquiry, our belief would become unlawful; for to obviate the rules of conduct, preſcribed to our underſtanding, were to overthrow all the laws of nature, to debaſe the dignity of mankind, and to efface the image of God implanted in us. Theſe rules aſſure us, that God cannot command any thing fooliſh or ridiculous.—No greater injury can be offered to the deity, than to believe him the author of any religion, which preſcribes, or encourages fooliſh or ſuperſtitious practices.—Juſtly does Plutarch wonder, why atheiſm ſhould rather be accuſed of impiety, than ſuperſtition; ſince few are moved any by defect in the order of government, to call in queſtion the exiſtence of God; but the trick and cheats of ſuperſtitious perſons, their enthuſiaſtic motions, ridiculous actions, exorciſms, and luſtrations, and ſuch like; give them occaſion to believe it better there ſhould be no God, than ſuch a God. as the author of ſuch a ſuperſtitious religion muſt neceſſarily be."*

If this author reaſons juſtly, as all proteſtants will al-

* Stillingfleet.

low, at leaſt, when they write againſt the enthuſiaſm of the church of Rome; does it not follow, that it is our duty, before we embrace any inſtituted religion, to examine by that light which God has given us into every part of it; and after a ſcrupulous trial, paſs ſentence on it? If the intereſt of truth, and the honor of man's nature require them to perform this grand duty, muſt not their reaſon, antecedently to all external revelation, afford certain teſts to diſtinguiſh between truth and falſehood, in all religious matters? It would be ridiculous to tell men, that is a crime worſe than atheiſm, to admit a religion, which preſcribes or encourages fooliſh or ſuperſtitious practices; unleſs upon a ſuppoſition, that their reaſon can tell them what are ſuch practices; and thereby hinder them from embracing a religion, which requires things of this nature. And if men are apt to embrace any religion (the mahometan for inſtance) which flatters their hopes of future felicity, and makes them loth to diſcover the pleaſing illuſion; does it not follow, that the more any religion does ſo, the more cauſe men have critically to examine into its reaſonableneſs? becauſe without ſuch a precedent enquiry, their belief would be irrational and unlawful, debaſing the dignity of mankind, and effacing the image of God implanted in them. And,

If the abſurdities, not only of the pagan religion, but even the moſt pernicious errors among Chriſtians, have been occaſioned through want of previous examination; nothing can be requiſite to diſcover true chriſtianity, and to preſerve it in its native purity, free from all ſuperſtition, but, after a ſtrict ſcrutiny, to admit nothing to belong to it, except what our reaſon tells us is worthy of having God for its author. And if it be evident that we cannot diſcern whether any inſtituted religion contains every thing worthy and nothing unworthy of a divine original; except we can antecedently by our reaſon diſcern what is or is not worthy of having God for its author; it neceſſarily follows, that natural and revealed religion cannot differ: becauſe, whatever reaſon ſhews

to be worthy of having God for its author muſt belong to natural religion; and whatever reaſon tells us is unworthy of having God for its author, can never belong to the true revealed religion. It is upon this very plan, that I have endeavored to ſhew you wherein true and genuine chriſtianity conſiſts.

B. By the reaſoning of theſe divines, religion is the plaineſt thing in the world: we, it ſeems, have nothing to do but to examine what notions are worthy of God, in order to know his will; but do they tell us how we may certainly know what thoſe notions are?

A. All divines, of what denomination ſoever, agree, at leaſt in words, that God cannot act arbitrarily in the government of the world, or command things for commanding's ſake; but that all his laws, being calculated for the good of mankind, carry with them the marks of conſummate wiſdom and goodneſs. However, I ſhall mention two.

The incomparable biſhop Tillotſon ſays, "It would be little leſs than an horrid and dreadful blaſphemy to ſay, that God, out of his ſovereign will and pleaſure, can do any thing which contradicts the nature of God, or the eſſential perfections of the deity; or to imagine that the pleaſure and will of the holy, juſt and good God, is not always regulated and determined by the eſſential and indiſpenſable laws of goodneſs, holineſs and righteouſneſs.

The judicious Mr. Scott affirms, "that to ſuppoſe the will and power of God is not perfectly ſubject to his moral perfections, is to ſuppoſe him a very defective and imperfect being; a lawleſs will and power being the greateſt defect in nature: wherefore, to ſecure our minds againſt all injurious apprehenſions of God, this is a moſt neceſſary rule; that we conceive him to be ſuch a being as can never will, or act any thing, but what his own eſſential wiſdom, goodneſs and juſtice do approve.—To affirm, he is not obliged to regulate himſelf by wiſdom, juſtice and goodneſs; or that he can do otherwiſe; is to attribute him a power to will, or act fooliſhly, &c."

B. I ſhould readily approve what the authors you quote have ſaid, to ſhew the reaſonableneſs of the divine law in every inſtance; were there not in religion, propoſitions to be believed, which are above reaſon.

A. If I do not underſtand the terms of a propoſition; or if they are inconſiſtent with one another; or ſo uncertain, that I know not what meaning to fix on them; here is nothing told me, and conſequently, no room for belief: but in ſuch caſes, where I am capable of underſtanding a propoſition, it is reaſon muſt inform me, whether it is certain, probable, or uncertain; and even in propoſitions relating to ſuch facts as we learn from report, it is by our reaſon alone, in comparing circumſtances, &c. that we muſt judge of their probability. But,

Although deſigning men very well know, that it is impoſſible to believe, when we know not what it is we are to believe; or to believe an abſurd, or contradictory propoſition; yet they, becauſe without examination people may be brought to fancy they believe ſuch things, and it being their intereſt to confound the underſtandings of men, and prevent all enquiry, craftily invented the notion of believing things above reaſon: here the ravings of an enthuſiaſt are on a level with the dictates of infinite wiſdom, and nonſenſe rendered moſt ſacred; here a contradiction is of great uſe to maintain a doctrine, that, when fairly ſtated, is not defenſible; becauſe by talking backward and forward, by uſing obſcure terms and taking words in different ſenſes, they may eaſily amuſe, and puzzle the people. On this foundation tranſubſtantiation is built, and moſt of thoſe myſterious propoſitions, about which, in former days, chriſtians ſo frequently murdered each other. But,

If the ſcripture was deſigned to be underſtood, it muſt be within the reach of human underſtanding; and conſequently, it cannot contain propoſitions that are either above, or below human underſtanding: and if there are no propoſitions in the bible, but what have certain ideas, by common uſage, annexed to the words; how can we ſuppoſe ſome are deſigned to be underſtood, and ſome

not ? or know which are, and which are not ? And indeed, if the end of God's giving a revelation was to direct men's thoughts and actions, it muſt (as neceſſary to that end) be delivered in ſuch a way, as is plain and eaſy to be underſtood, even by mean capacities; and conſequently to ſuppoſe it dark and myſterious in any part, is to repreſent it as unworthy of having God for its author. And,

One would think, that men, when they knew they had truth on their ſide, would ſpeak after the plaineſt manner, and not ſtudy to diſguiſe it by unnatural ways of expreſſing themſelves; eſpecially, when they reflect on others for ſo doing.

The chriſtians ſaid, the heathens were conſcious their religion was abſurd by their having recourſe to allegorical, ænigmatical, and myſterious explications; and conſequently, that it could not be deſigned for the common people, incapable of ſuch explications; and that their prieſts, inſtead of defending it, rendered it uncertain; ſince where the literal ſenſe is quitted, there may be many allegorical, or ſpiritual ſenſes, oppoſite to one another; and indeed, the wiſe men anong them, as Tully, &c. owned as much.

Nor did the heathens fail to retort the like objection upon the chriſtians; and, in truth, they equalled, if not out-did them in allegoriſing away, not only the plaineſt texts, but even matter of fact; which proved the occaſion of innumerable hereſies.

Dupin, ſpeaking of the extravagant opinions, which obtained among ſilly people in the primitive times, ſays, "They ſprang from the principles of Pagan philoſophers; and from the myſteries, which cracked brained men put on the hiſtory of the Old and New Teſtament, according to their imaginations; the more extraordinary theſe opinions were, the more did they reliſh, and the better did they like them; and thoſe who invented them, publiſhed them gravely as great myſteries to the ſimple, who were all diſpoſed to receive them." But could any cracked-brained writers have found out more myſteries

in the Old and New-Teſtament than the primitive fathers, (who interpreted them according to their imaginations, and jumbled them together with that Pagan philoſophy they were educated in?) Or have publiſhed their myſterious reveries with greater gravity to ſimple people, always diſpoſed to receive what they did not underſtand?

The ſame author, ſpeaking of St. Bernabas' catholic epiſtle in anſwer to this objection, "that it was incredible ſo great an apoſtle, full of the holy ghoſt, and colleague of St. Paul, ſhould be the author of ſuch forced allegories, and extravagant explications of ſcripture; of thoſe various fables concerning animals, with divers other conceits of the like nature? ſays, "they have but little knowledge of the Jewiſh nation, and of the primitive chriſtians, educated in the ſynagogues, who obſtinately believe, that ſuch ſort of motions could not proceed from them; that on the contrary, it was their very character to turn the whole ſcripture into Allegory."

I think, none of our celebrated writers reject this epiſtle as ſpurious, becauſe of the allegories it abounds with: Our excellent archbiſhop Wake ſays, "Even St. Paul himſelf in his epiſtles, received by us as canonical, affords us not a few inſtances of this, which is ſo much found fault with in St. Barnabas: As I might eaſily make appear from a multitude of paſſages out of them, were it needful for me to enlarge myſelf on a point, which every one, who has read the ſcriptures with any care, cannot chuſe but have obſerved." And thoſe chriſtians St. Paul mentions, for believing the reſurrection was paſt, were, no doubt, great allegoriſts.

The primitive fathers exactly followed the precedent ſet them by the apoſtle Barnabas, and other apoſtolical men: Clemens of Alexandria ſays, "The œconomy of the law, is typical and prophetical; and that Moſes and the prophets, wrote all in parables." So Tertullian, "The law is ſpiritual and prophetical, and almoſt in all points figurative." And Le Clerk obſerves, that "The fathers did not content themſelves with interpreting the

Old Teſtament allegorically, but they did the ſame as to the New."——But becauſe,

Origen was famous for this allegorical method, and by virtue of it eſteemed the greateſt champion of chriſtianity, next to the apoſtles; and ſince what he ſays, was not only its own, but the ſenſe of the then church, it will not be improper to cite him. "If we adhere, ſays he, to the letter; or underſtand what is written in the law of God, as the Jews do, in the common acceptation of the words; I bluſh to own, that God ever gave ſuch laws: for mere human conſtitutions, as thoſe of the Romans, Athenians, or Lacedæmonians, will ſeem more reaſonable and proper; but if the law of God is to be underſtood in the ſenſe of the church teaches, then truly it exceeds all human ordinances." For which reaſon he makes the allegorical way of interpreting ſcripture to be the key of knowledge; and following the letter of the law, the direct way to infidelity and vain ſuperſtition. *Literam ſequentes in infidelitatem, & varias ſuperſtitiones incurrunt.* And he objects to Marcion the heretic, that he was againſt the allegorical way of interpreting ſcripture.

B. Do not theſe fathers ſuppoſe God either a weak being, who could not frame as wiſe laws as men; or elſe an ill-natured being, who, in order to puzzle mankind ſpeaks in riddles and myſteries? What ſhould we think of a lawyer, who ſaid, he ſhould be aſhamed of the laws of his own country, if taken in a literal ſenſe; but that there was an allegorical ſenſe, which could one but hit, would diſcover profound wiſdom?

A. Thus the fathers ſufficiently acknowledged the ſovereignity of reaſon, in allegoriſing away matters of fact, that were in truth, uncapable of being allegoriſed; though that is but running into one unreaſonable thing, to get rid of another: And how can we depend on any thing ſaid in the ſcripture, if we cannot on its facts? One would think nothing was a plainer fact, than than that of Lot's lying with his two danghters, yet St. Irenæus allegoriſes that away; and is ſo fond of allego-

riſing, that for the ſake of it, he contradicts the ſcripture, and ſays, "The harlot Rahab entertained three ſpies;" and had he not made them three, he would have been at a loſs, how to ſay, as he does, that this harlot hid in her houſe, father, ſon, and holy ghoſt. "How can we be edified," ſays Origen, "in reading that ſo great a patriarch as Abraham, not only lyed to Abimelech, but alſo betrayed to him the chaſtity of his wife? What inſtructions can we reap from the wife of ſo great a patriarch, if we think ſhe was expoſed to be debauched by her huſband's contrivance? Let the Jews believe ſuch things, and thoſe with them, who are greater friends to the letter than to the ſpirit."

He aſſerts, "That there are, even in the goſpel, things ſaid, which, according to the letter, or taken in their literal ſenſe, are mere falſities or lyes; as where our ſaviour ſays, He that believeth in me, the works that I do, ſhall he do alſo; and greater works than theſe ſhall he do. John xiv. 12, &c. which he ſhews, was not verifyed literally, but ſpiritually." And,

"That it was want of knowledge in the ſcriptures, to think, that God ſpent ſix real days in the work of the creation."

He deſires any one to ſhew, "How the truth of the goſpels can be maintained, or their ſeeming contrarieties cleared by any other than the anagogical method; which he affirms neceſſary for that purpoſe."

He ſays. "The pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons, offered for Jeſus, were not ſuch as we ſee with our carnal eyes; not birds, ſuch as fly in the air, but ſomething divine and auguſt, beyond human contemplation," &c.

If you deſire to be more plentifully furniſhed with inſtances of the like nature with thoſe above-mentioned, conſult the philocalia of Origen.

St. Auſtin, a man of the greateſt authority of all the fathers, ſays, "We muſt not take the ſtory of Jacob's cheating his father, by perſonating his brother Eſau, literally, leſt the ſcripture ſhould ſeem to encourage lying."

And ſpeaking of Jeſus curſing the fig-tree, ſays, *hoc factum, niſi figuratum, ſtultum invenitur.* And he, with the reſt of the fathers, not only moſt unnaturally allegoriſes away the hiſtory of the fall, but even of the whole creation; and ſays, "The whole world was created in an inſtant." And though there is not one word about angels in the text, yet this angelical Doctor makes part of the ſix days labor relate to the creation of angels.

B. But how could he account for God's inſtituting the Sabbath, upon his reſting from his ſix days labor, if all things were created in an inſtant?

A. How happy he was in allegoriſing, you may judge from his explaining that paſſage of Geneſis, iii. 14. where the Latin verſion which he followed, runs thus; Upon thy breaſt, and upon thy belly ſhalt thou go, and duſt ſhalt thou eat all the days of thy life. By the breaſt, ſays he, is to be underſtood pride; by the belly, the luſts of the fleſh; and by that which is added, duſt thou ſhalt eat, is meant curioſity, which extends to things temporal and earthly; and by curioſity, he means avarice. And,

St. Ambroſe will not allow the rainbow to be the bow, which God placed in the clouds; and ſaith, "Far be it from us to call this God's bow; for this bow, which is called Iris, is ſeen indeed in the day, but never appears in the night:" For which weighty reaſon he ſubſtitutes in its room, a ſtrange allegorical bow, out of his own imagination.

If the fathers could allegoriſe away the moſt ſtubborn matters of fact, they could have no difficulty in allegoriſing away any other matter, where words are capable of various ſenſes: One would think, it was difficult to find out an allegorical meaning to this text, O daughter of Babylon, happy is he, who taketh, and daſhes thy little ones againſt the ſtones, yet nothing is too hard for Origen, who aſſures us that the text intends, The man who daſhes his vicious thoughts againſt the ſolid rock of reaſon.

And, indeed, the fathers have ſo turned and twiſted

the ſcripture, with a pious intention to make it ſpeak nothing but what they thought agreeable to reaſon; that they have rendered it like Ariſtotle's *materia prima; nec quid, nec quale, nec quamtum, nec aliquid eorum de quibus ens denominatur:* For by making the ſcripture, in ſo many places ſay one thing, and mean another, they have deſtroyed its certainty; ſince as Le Clerk obſerves, "If according to this method, the ſacred writers had ſaid quite another thing than what they ſaid, or, if you will the quite contrary, yet one may find as good ſenſe in them; as thoſe that will try it, will preſently obſerve.——Therefore the chriſtians, and the Jews would have done much better to keep cloſe to the letter, than to uſe ſo uncertain a method, to defend the holy ſcripture againſt the Pagans."

B. All the fathers do not allegoriſe like Origen; Juſtin Martyr for inſtance, aſſerts, that the threatening, that, in the day thou eateſt therof, thou ſhalt ſurely die, was literally fulfilled, in that Adam did not live out a thouſand years; which, with God, is but one day. But to go no farther than the ſtory of Abraham's proſtituting his wife; St. Ambroſe, to juſtify Abraham's conduct, roundly aſſerts adultery to be no crime before the giving of the law by Moſes. And St. Auſtin makes adultery ſtill lawful, if huſband and wife conſent. St. Jerom, indeed, runs into the other extreme, and approves the conduct of thoſe who killed themſelves to preſerve their chaſtity. But the moſt eloquent St. Chryſoſtom enlarges very much in commendation of Abraham and Sarah, and ſays, "Though nothing gives a huſband more uneaſineſs, than to imagine his wife has to do with another, yet this juſt man did what he could, even to accompliſh the act of adultery."—And adds, that "Sarah too" whom he ſets as a pattern for all married women, "accepted the propoſal very courageouſly;" and then cries out, who can enough admire this readineſs to obey her huſband? who can ſufficiently celebrate the praiſes of Sarah, who, after ſo long continence, and at her great age, readily conſented to this act of adultery, and to let

the barbarian have the uſe of her body, to ſave her huſband ?

A. Might not thoſe fathers as well have allegorized, as talked thus abſurdly ? It is chiefly owing to the papiſts taking ſome words in a literal ſenſe, relating to the eating the fleſh, and drinking the blood of the ſon of man, that makes them to be of a different religion from the proteſtants: and though two parties may agree, in taking the ſame words in an allegorical ſenſe; yet by allegoriſing them indifferently, they may be of different religions. By allegoriſing ſome texts, the Jews have made the Meſſiah a temporal prince, the Chriſtians a ſpiritual one. Mr. Whiſton muſt think there are no words ſo plain, but are capable of being allegoriſed; ſince he ſuppoſes the catholic church has all along allegorized plain love-ſongs, between Solomon and one of his miſtreſſes, into ſpiritual hymns between Chriſt and his ſpouſe, the church. And what Dr. South muſt have thought of the revelations, I leave you to judge; when he does not ſcruple to call it, a myſterious extraordinary book; which, perhaps, the more it is ſtudied the leſs it is underſtood; as generally finding a man cracked, or making himſelf ſo. And had not the mahometan divines had the knack of allegoriſing nonſenſe, fools and frantic perſons would not have been had in ſuch honor and reverence among the muſſelmen, only becauſe their revelations and enthuſiaſms tranſported them out of the ordinary temper of humanity. Therefore, upon the whole, I muſt needs ſay, happy is the man, who is ſo far, at leaſt, directed by the law of reaſon, and the religion of nature, as to ſuffer no myſteries, or unintelligible propoſitions, no allegories, no hyperboles, no metaphors, types, parables, or phraſes of an uncertain ſignification, to confound his underſtanding. And certainly, the common parent of mankind is too good and gracious, to put the happineſs of all his children on any other doctrines, than ſuch as plainly ſhew themſelves to be the will of God, even to the ignorant and illiterate; if they have but courage and honeſty to make uſe of their reaſon; other-

wiſe the ſcripture would not be plain in all neceſſary things; even to babes and ſucklings.

B. You ſuppoſe then, that the bulk of mankind are taught by God himſelf, to know what religion comes from him; even though they want letters, to make them capable of underſtanding thoſe external proofs, on which all traditional religions do, and muſt depend.

CHAP. XIII.

The bulk of mankind, by their reaſon, muſt be able to diſtinguiſh between religion and ſuperſtition; otherwiſe they can never extricate themſelves from that ſuperſtition they chance to be educated in.

A. RELIGION either does not concern the majority, as being incapable of forming judgment about it; or, it muſt carry ſuch internal marks of its truth, as men of mean capacity are able to diſcover; or elſe notwithſtanding the infinite variety of religions, all who do not underſtand the original languages their traditional religions are written in, which is all mankind, a very few excepted, are alike bound in all places to pin their faith on their prieſts; and believe in men, who have an intereſt to deceive them; and who have ſeldom failed to do ſo, when occaſion ſerved.

Can people, if incapable by their reaſon to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood, have any thing more to plead for the truth of their religion, than that they believe it to be the true religion; becauſe their prieſts, who are hired to maintain it, tell them it was along while ago revealed to certain perſons, who, as they on their prieſtly words aſſure them, were too wiſe to be impoſed on themſelves, and too honeſt to impoſe on others? And that no change

could have been made in their religion in after-times; the care men have of their own ſouls, as well as their natural affections to poſterity, obliging them from generation to generation, to hand down their religion juſt as they received it: and that it was morally impoſſible, innovaſions ſhould creep in, ſince it would be the higheſt folly in any to attempt to introduce new doctrines, as a tradition received from their anceſtors, when all muſt know they had received no ſuch tradition. As this is all, the bulk of mankind, if they are not capable of judging from the doctrines themſelves of their truth, can ſay for their religion; ſo they, in all places, make uſe of this argument; and with equal confidence aver, that though all other extraordinary religions are full of groſs falſehoods, and the moſt abſurd notions, which their prieſts impudently impoſe on them as divine truths, yet our own prieſts are ſuch faithful repreſenters of things, that one may as well queſtion the truth of all hiſtory, as the truth of things believed on their authority. Prieſts of other religions, we know, will lye for intereſt; and conſcious that their traditional religion will not bear examination, guard it with penal laws; but we can never ſuſpect, that our own prieſts, though they take the ſame methods, act on the ſame motives.

This boaſted argument, in which men of all religions thus triumph, if it proves any thing, would prove there never was, nor could be any falſe religion, either in whole, or part; becauſe truth being before falſehood, and the anceſtors of men having once poſſeſſed it, no change could afterward ever happen: Whereas on the contrary, though there have been at times great numbers of traditional religions, yet as far as it appears, no one of them has long remained the ſame; at leaſt, in ſuch points as were merely founded on tradition.

I ſee no middle, but that we muſt either own, that there are ſuch internal marks fixed on every part of the true religion, as will enable the bulk of mankind to diſtinguiſh it from all falſe religions; or elſe that all traditionary religions are upon a level: Since thoſe, who,

in every country, are hired to maintain them, will not fail to aſſert, they have all external marks; ſuch as, uninterrupted traditions, inconteſted miracles, confeſſion of adverſaries, number of proſelytes, agreement among themſelves; and all thoſe other external arguments, that the papiſts and mahometans ſet ſo high a value on. In this caſe, what can the common people do, who underſtand not a word of the language, their religion and its external proofs are writ in, but be of the religion in which they are educated? eſpecially, if nothing is ſuffered to be publiſhed, which may in the leaſt tend to make them queſtion its truth; and all other religions are repreſented as full of the groſſeſt abſurdities.

Had the people of Rome in the primitive times of chriſtianity, been governed by external marks, none of them had quitted their old religion, which had every external mark proper to recommend it; and under which they were ſo bleſſed, as to become maſters of the beſt part of the known world. But,

Becauſe this is a point, wherein the greateſt part of mankind are at all times nearly concerned, I ſhall beg leave to mention, though it be ſomewhat long, what Mr. Locke ſays on this head.

Have the bulk of mankind no other guide, "but accident, and blind chance, to conduct them to their happineſs or miſery? Are the current opinions, and licenſed guides of every country ſufficient evidence and ſecurity to every man to venture his great concernments on; nay, his everlaſting happineſs or miſery? Or, can thoſe be the certain and infallible oracles and ſtandards of truth, which teach one thing in Chriſtendom, and another in Turkey,? Or, ſhall a poor country-man be eternally happy, for having the chance to be born in Italy; or a day laborer be unavoidably loſt, becauſe he had the ill-luck to be born in England? How ready ſome men may be to ſay ſome of theſe things, I will not here examine; but this I am ſure, that men muſt allow one or other of theſe to be true; (let them chuſe which they pleaſe,) or elſe grant, that God has furniſhed men

with faculties ſufficient to direct them in the way they ſhould take, if they will but ſeriouſly employ them that way, when their ordinary vocations allow them the leiſure.—There cannot be a more dangerous thing to rely on, than the opinion of others, nor more likely to miſlead one; ſince there is much more falſehood and error among men than truth and knowledge: And if the opinions and perſuaſions of others, who we know, and think well of, be a ground of aſſent, men have reaſon to be heathens in Japan, mahometans in Turkey, papiſts in Spain, proteſtants in England, and lutherans in Sweden.

Was there a ſet of prieſts, on whoſe authority the common people were every where to depend for their religious ſentiments, they muſt be known by ſome plain, external marks: To ſay the people muſt follow thoſe prieſts that are in the right, is to ſuppoſe people muſt judge what is right; and then judge (if that concerned them) whether any ſet of prieſts are in the right; and if men cannot believe, when they ſee no reaſon for believing, what reaſon can the bulk of mankind have to prefer one religion before a number of others, on the account of ſuch things, as, upon prieſtly authority, are believed to belong to every one of them; ſuch as viſions, dreams, trances, extacies, inſpirations, conferences with ſpirits, traditionary report about miracles, &c.? And ſhould the chance of education throw men into the true traditionary religion, yet conſidering its ſtyle is not very exact, there being generally more expreſſed than is meant; and things of the greateſt conſequence are often ſo treated, as that men cannot from thence perceive the nature and extent of their duty; and even precepts of the greateſt moment are ſometimes ſo far from being delivered plainly and ſimply, that they are expreſſed after a general, undetermined, nay, hyperbolical manner; ſo that even in this caſe, there is a neceſſity for the common people to have recourſe to the reaſon of things.

Are not the unlearned wholly unacquainted with thoſe keys of ſolution (as they are called) which the

learned have ſuch frequent recourſe to; ſuch as thoſe of a tranſpoſition of words or clauſes, errors of copies, various readings, various meanings of the ſame word, punctuation, taking away or adding of the negative particle; alluſion to cuſtoms, conſideration of the matter in hand, exaggeration, interrogation, parentheſis, literal ſenſe, figurative ſenſe; want of exactneſs in the ſacred writers, prudence in concealing ſome things, or in complying with ſome opinions prevailing in their times; condeſcenſion to Pagans or Jews; uſing ſuch ideas as prevailed in ſuch a religion; prejudication in the hearers, anſwers ſuitable to their needs, rather than to their queries; compendious expreſſions, phraſeology of that time, the author's nation, or native country; parallel paſſages, precepts peculiar to the apoſtles, advices to perfection, cenſures againſt certain heretics, the circumſtances of the ſubject, the ſcope of the author, what goes before, and what follows; the barrenneſs of the Hebrew tongue; and conſequently, its ambiguity, its particular idioms, the various ſenſes of the ſame verb, in different conjugations; the want of certain ways of expreſſion uſed in other tongues; the ſublime and metaphorical expreſſions moſt frequent to the oriental languages; the imitation of the Hebrew idiom in the LXX verſion; and in the original text of the New Teſtament Greek of the ſynagogue, &c.

The bulk of mankind being incapable of metaphyſical ſpeculations, and their underſtandings given them to diſcern thoſe rules of action which God preſcribes them, he has, no doubt, adjuſted one to the other; and conſequently, the ſimplicity, the reaſonableneſs, the conveniency and uſefulneſs of theſe rules, point them out to be the will of God, to men in theſe places, and conditions of life; but to carry things further, can only ſerve the deſigns of ill men, who have taken occaſion from thence to abuſe their credulity to the vileſt purpoſes.

Can, for inſtance, the common people, who underſtand not a word of the language the Jewiſh books are

writ in, be better judges than the jews themſelves of the meaning of their own books; and of their own prophets ſpeaking in their own language? Or, are the common people capable of judging of the innumerable diſputes among chriſtians; if thoſe likewiſe depend, not on the reaſon of things, but on the critical underſtanding of books, written in dead languages; nay, what do they know of the diſtinguiſhing doctrines of their own churches? They, indeed, on all ſides, know whom their leaders would have them hate; but little, or nothing of thoſe opinions, which divide their leaders.

B. Is there any divine of note, who makes revelation thus difficult to be underſtood by the ignorant, and unlearned?

A. I ſhall mention one, againſt whom you have no exception; who repreſents it thus obſcure, even to the learned. Is not biſhop Taylor (highly eſteemed for his devotional, as well as polemical works) a competent judge in this matter? and he (ſumming up, and that very briefly, what he had ſpent ſeveral chapters to prove at large) ſays, "Since there are ſo many copies with infinite varieties of reading; ſince a various interpunction, a parentheſis, a letter, an accent, may much alter the ſenſe; ſince ſome places have divers literal ſenſes, many have ſpiritual, myſtical and allegorical meanings; ſince there are ſo many tropes, metonymies, ironies, hyperboles, proprieties and improprieties of language, whoſe underſtanding depends upon ſuch circumſtances, that it is almoſt impoſſible to know the proper interpretation; now that the knowledge of ſuch circumſtances, and particular ſtories, is irrecoverably loſt: ſince there are ſome myſteries, which at the beſt advantage of expreſſion, are not eaſily to be apprehended; and whoſe explication, by reaſon of our imperfections, muſt needs be dark, ſometimes unintelligible: and laſtly, ſince thoſe ordinary means of expounding ſcripture, as ſearching the originals, conference of places, parity of reaſon, analogy of faith, are all dubious, uncertain and very fallible; he that is wiſeſt, and by conſequence, the like-

lieſt to expound trueſt, in all probability of reaſon, will be very far from confidence; becauſe every one of them, and many more, are like ſo many degrees of improbability and incertainty, all depreſſing our certainty of finding out truth in ſuch myſteries, and amidſt ſo many difficulties.

And in another place, "The obſcurity of ſome queſtions, the niceties of ſome articles, the intricacy of ſome revelations, the variety of human underſtandings, the winding of logic, the tricks of adverſaries, the ſubtilty of ſophiſters, the engagement of educations, perſonal affections, the portentious number of writers, the infinity of authorities, the vaſtneſs of ſome arguments, conſiſting in an enumeration of many particulars, the incertainty of others, the ſeveral degrees of probability, the difficulties of ſcripture, the invalidity of probation, of tradition, the oppoſition of all exterior arguments to one another, and their open conteſtation, the public violence done to authors and records, the private arts and ſupplantings, the falſifyings, the indefatigable induſtry of ſome men, to abuſe all underſtandings, and all perſuaſions into their own opinions: Theſe, and a thouſand more, have made it impoſſible for a man in ſo great a variety of matter not to be deceived." And I might add in confirmation of the biſhop's ſentiments, and demonſtrate too, were it not endleſs to go through particulars, that there is ſcarce a text, except in things of their own nature evident, where commentators do not differ. Whether theſe conſiderations alone, be not a ſufficient reaſon for the unlearned to adhere to thoſe plain, ſimple truths the light of nature dictates, I leave you to judge?

And do not other divines, in effect, ſay the ſame, when they make religion not to be implanted in human nature; but an art ſo far above the capacity of common people, that it requires great learning and labor to be competently ſkilled; And tell us, that they, who have ſpent their time in ſtudying it, cannot have too much honor or too great rewards given them, for deciding for

the people, points of religion, as the common-law judges do points of property; and that people juſtly incur the dreadful anathema pronounced in ſynods and councils, againſt thoſe who refuſe to ſubmit to their deciſions; and that it is the duty of the magiſtrate to ſee their decrees put in execution.

A. right in prieſts, whether in, or out of convocations, to judge, and determine for the people, what they ſhall believe and profeſs, ſuppoſes a duty in them ſo to believe, and ſo to profeſs; and conſequently, that the religion of the laity conſiſts in believing the prieſts; and what ever they decree, is to be the rule of their actions.

B. This is too ſevere; they only claim a power of interpreting the laws of chriſt, not of making new laws themſelves.

A. There is only a verbal difference between a lawmaker and a ſovereign interpreter of laws, to whoſe interpretations all are obliged to ſubmit; ſo that ever ſince the council of——people have been taught to renounce both natural and revealed religion: and become prieſt worſhipers, and to have a divine faith in their dictates; and indeed ſo they ought, if theſe prieſts had, as they claim, a judicial power to determine of mens condition hereafter; and thereby make God a mere executioner of their ſentences, by which they bind, or looſe mens ſins to eternity.

And this notion carries with it the higheſt blaſphemy and idolatry, ſo I think it is treated too gently by Mr. Chillingworth, in ſaying, "This preſumptuous impoſing of the ſenſes of men upon the words of God, the ſpecial ſenſes of men upon the general words of God, and laying them upon mens conſciences together under the equal penalty of death and damnation: this vain conceit, that we can ſpeak of the things of God better than the words of God; this deifying our own interpretations, and tyrannous inforcing them upon others; this reſtraining of the word of God from that latitude and generality; and the underſtanding of men from that liberty, which chriſt and his apoſtles left them; is and

hath been the only fountain of all the ſchiſms of the church; and that which makes the immortal; the common incendiary of chriſtendom, and that which tears in pieces, not the coat, but the bowels and members of chriſt: *Ridente Turca, nec dolente Judæo.*

In ſhort, true religion cannot but be plain, ſimple, and natural, as deſigned for all mankind, adapted to every capacity, and ſuited to every condition and circumſtance of life; and if it be rendered otherwiſe, is it not owing to thoſe, who have made it their buſineſs to puzzle mankind, and render plain things obſcure; in order to get the conſciences, and conſequently, the properties of the people at their diſpoſal, and to be in a manner adored notwithſtanding the groſſeſt immoralities, as the ſole diſpenſers of ſuch things, as no way relate to the good of the community; and to deſtroy all that will not comply with their pernicious deſigns, as enemies of God, and his holy church? And,

Though the clergy have taken all poſſible methods for a blind ſubmiſſion, and a forced uniformity, yet they have not been able to hinder chriſtians from being endleſly divided, even in what they call fundamentals. And though no one ſect, as far as I can find, have ventured to give us a complete ſet of their fundamentals; yet all ſects unanimouſly own, that thoſe things, which are neceſſary to the ſalvation of chriſtians, muſt be ſo plain, as that all chriſtians, even thoſe of the meaneſt capacities, may apprehend them. Would not one think that a little honeſt reflection ſhould carry them further, and make them ſee, that it is inconſiſtent with the univerſal and unlimited goodneſs of the common parent of mankind, not to make that which is neceſſary for the ſalvation of all men ſo plain, as that all men may know it? Though one would be apt to think, that by the number and oddneſs of thoſe things, which in moſt churches divines have made neceſſary to ſalvation, they were more zealous to damn others than to ſave themſelves, or, at leaſt, that they thought there was no room in heaven for any, but men of their own narrow principles. But,

Let me aſk theſe charitable gentlemen, whether the happineſs of others would make chriſtians unhappy ? or, what prejudice it will be to them, to ſuppoſe God is no reſpecter of perſons; but that all may come to him, who believe that he will reward thoſe in all nations, and at all times, who have diligently ſought him ?

Natural religion, which is of the greateſt importance to mankind, and is a perpetual ſtanding rule for men of the meaneſt, as well as the higheſt capacity, carries its own evidence with it, thoſe internal inſeparable marks of truth ; but can that be ſaid of any religion, which depends on tradition ? Does not that want foreign aid and aſſiſtance ? Ought we not to be certain, that the firſt propagators of it could not be impoſed on themſelves, or would not impoſe on others ? or in other words, were infallible, and impeccable ? But ſince numbers have taken reveries for divine inſpirations, ought we not to have certain marks to diſtinguiſh the one from the other ? nor is this alone ſufficient ; for if evil beings can impreſs notions in mens minds as ſtrongly as good beings, and cauſe miracles to be done in confirmation of them : is there any way to know, to which of the two, notions thus impreſſed are owing, but from their natural tendency ; or thoſe internal marks of wiſdom and goodneſs, by which they plainly ſhew themſelves to be a part of natural religion ? If ſo, can external proofs carry us farther than the internal proofs do ? But,

It is not enough to be certain, theſe men were not impoſed on ; we muſt be certain, they would on no occaſion whatever impoſe on others : or, in other words, were not men of like paſſions and infirmities with other mortals. Does not the ſcripture give very many inſtances of inſpired perſons as much governed by their paſſions as uninſpired ? Was not Abraham, though a prophet, and ſo dear to God, that he would not deſtroy a neighbouring town without acquainting him with it, guilty of an inceſtuous marriage, his wife being his ſiſter by the fathers ſide ? And did he not endeavour to betray her chaſtity to two kings, in diſowning her to be his wife, by

which conduct he got from one of them, who entreated him well for her ſake, men and maid-ſervants, ſheep, oxen, aſſes and camels; and from the other, a thouſand pieces, of ſilver, beſides ſheep, oxen, men and women-ſervants? and immediately after his faith was counted to him for righteouſneſs,* did he not doubt of God's promiſe, till God ſpoke to him in a deep ſleep?

Was not David, though a prophet, and a man after God's own heart, guilty of many enormous crimes, from the time he deſigned to have murdered all the males in Nabal's family, becauſe he would not pay contributions to him, and thoſe men, who out of debt, diſcontent and diſtreſs joined him? though Nabal, by ſo doing, might have incurred the fate of thoſe prieſts, from whom David by ſeveral falſehoods got both ſhew-bread and Goliah's ſword.† What could be more treacherous, than his invading people, that were at leaſt in peace, if not allies of the king of Gath, to whom he fled for ſafety; and having neither ſaved man or woman alive to bring tidings, told his generous protector, he had been making an inroad in Judæa. ‡

In a word, (not to mention his treatment of Uriah, which no brave man can think of without horror) did he not leave the world in a very unforgiving temper, when the laſt thing he commanded his ſon Solomon, was to put Shemei to death, § though he had ſworn before the lord, that he would not put him to death, and that he ſhould not die? ‖

Solomon, though inſpired with wiſdom from above, and had conferences with God himſelf, yet his paſſion for women made him guilty of groſs idolatry. And not to multiply inſtances; we find one man of God lying to another man of God, in the name of God; purely for the pleaſure of making him eat bread, and drink water with him. ¶ And if we go to the new teſtament, it is

* Gen. xviii. 15. xx. 12. xii. 19. xx. 2. xii. 26. xx. 16. xv. 6, 8. xii. 13. † 1 Sam. xxv. 22. xxii. 2. xxi 6, 9. xxvii. 8. 12. ‡ 1 Kings ii. 8, 9. ‖ 1 Sam. xix. 23. ¶ 1 Kings xiii 18.

plain, by what our saviour says to those, who had prophesyed, and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in his name, depart from me, ye that work iniquity; * that neither prophesies, nor miracles, are absolute securities for men to depend on. Nay, do we not find one of the apostles, though he, with the rest, had the power of doing miracles, even to the raising of the dead, betraying his master for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver? and the other apostles not only fled, and deserted him; but the chief of them foreswore him, as oft as he was asked about his being one of his followers; and he, as well as Barnabas, was afterwards guilty of a mean piece of dissimulation. † And Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp contention, though about a very indifferent matter as to cause a separation: ‡ and even St. Paul says, the good that I would do, I do not; but the evil which I would not do, that I do.—but I see another law in my members, warring against the the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. § And a great deal more to the same purpose.

Do not these instances, though many more might be added, plainly shew, that inspired persons, whether prophets or apostles, are subject to the same passions, even to dissembling and lying, as other men? And that we sin against that reason, which was given us to distinguish between good and evil; religion and superstition; if we do not by it examine all doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever delivered? But supposing prophets and apostles impeccable as well as infallible; yet what certainty can people have, that those things which were taught by them have been faithfully conveyed down for many generations together by men, who were far from being infallible or impeccable? So that here, certainly, they ought to make use of their reason, in judging of all doctrines thus conveyed. Admitting tradition had been a

* Mat. vii. 22, 23 x. 8. xxvi. 72. † Gal. ii. 13. ‡ Acts xiii. 59. § Rom. vii. 19. 23.

faithful conveyancer, yet how can the common people be certain the ſcripture has been truly tranſlated? But granting even that; yet ſince moſt texts are vaſtly varied, and ſometimes contrary interpretations, and the literal ſenſe very often kills; how can they be confident they do not miſtake their meaning, except the reaſon of things makes it evident? but ſuppoſing no ſuch uncertainty in the meaning of texts, yet ſince the ſcripture contains ſome precepts which are occaſional, obliging only certain perſons, upon certain occaſions, and in certain circumſtances; and others that are of an eternal obligation and makes no diſtinction in delivering them; can men, even the moſt learned, have any other way of knowing one from the other, but from the nature of the precepts; and that thoſe only are of eternal obligation, which are founded on the eternal reaſon of things; and which would eternally oblige, whether delivered in ſcripture or not? And,

Let me further add, that to make external revelation of any uſe, muſt we not, as I have already obſerved, be able to determine, whether God is obliged to act, as he declares in it he will do? and in order to ſettle this important point, which revelation itſelf can never do, muſt not our reaſon tell us, that infinite wiſdom can have no commands, but what are founded on the unalterable reaſon of things? and if God could command at one time for commanding's ſake in any one point, he might do ſo in all points and times; and conſequently that an arbitrary will, which might change every moment, would govern all things? and can they who plead that their external revelation is the unchangeable will of God, any otherwiſe do it, but by having recourſe to the nature of God, by which they cannot but perceive, that the will of God before, as well as ſince any external revelation, muſt be as immutable as God himſelf; as being founded on the eternal reaſon of things? ſo that they who make the will of God, whether revealed by himſelf or any meſſenger, not to be unchangeably the ſame, deſtroy all poſſible proof, that any external revelation could be,

or at leaſt continue to be the will of God. Thus you ſee, that take what hypotheſis you pleaſe, yet you can prove nothing to be his will, but what the nature of God and the nature of things point out to all men, who dare uſe their reaſon, to be his will, his immutable will.

Among the numerous anſwerers of the grounds and reaſons of the chriſtian religion, Mr. Chandler is deſervedly reckoned to ſtand in the foremoſt rank; and this judicious divine ſays, that "natural religion is the only foundation, upon which revelation can be ſupported: and which muſt be underſtood, before any man is capable of judging either of the nature and evidence of chriſtianity: and I am perſuaded," ſays he, "that it is to the want of a due knowledge of the firſt principles of all religion, thoſe miſtakes about the chriſtian are owing, that have obſcured the ſimplicity of it, and prejudiced many againſt entertaining, and believing it.—If natural religion is not part of the religion of Chriſt, it is ſcarce worth while to enquire at all what his religion is. If it be, then the preaching natural religion is preaching Chriſt.—The religion of Chriſt muſt be underſtood before it can or ought to be believed; and that it muſt be proved to be a conſiſtent and rational religion, before they can be under any obligation to receive it.

"And, indeed, why ſhould not every man inſiſt upon thoſe things? the only conſequence that I can imagine can flow from it is, not that the cauſe of Chriſtianity will ſuffer; which will ſtand the teſt of the moſt impartial enquiry; but that the rigid directors of the faith and conſciences of men will loſe their authority, and human ſchemes and creeds, that have been ſet up in the room of Chriſtianity, will fall into the contempt they ſo juſtly deſerve.

"It is my hearty prayer to the father of lights, and the God of truth, that all human authority in matters of faith, may come to a full end; and that every one, who hath reaſon to direct him, and a ſoul to ſave, may be his own judge in every thing that concerns his eternal welfare, without any prevailing regard to the dictates of

fallible men, or fear of their peeviſh, and impotent cenſures." And in this prayer, I believe, every honeſt man will join.

The reverend and judicious Mr. Bullock, in ſumming up what I have been endeavouring to prove at large; ſays, "a revelation coming from God, unleſs it be known to be ſuch, is in effect the ſame, as having none at all.—Shall a man," ſays he, "embrace the firſt religion that offers itſelf to him, and without ſeeking any further, ſtick cloſe to the principles of his education? if this were ſafe, then all the contradictory notions that are in the world, would be equally ſafe and true; and there would be no ſuch thing as a falſe religion, or the ſpirit of error any where: but this will not be admitted. Is truth, then, confined to any certain country, or to any particular ſet of men? no: but if it were, ſtill there would remain this difficulty, to be aſſured to what country, or to what ſort of men it belonged. If this were all the rule we had to go by, every man, no doubt, would be partial to his own country, and to thoſe men he is beſt acquainted with. And ſo the principles of education muſt prevail every where, inſtead of true religion."

In anſwer to theſe, and ſuch like objections, he ſays, "We are well aſſured, that God is the author of our beings, and all our faculties; and we cannot but acknowledge, that our underſtanding is the moſt excellent faculty he has given us. It is in that we excel the beaſts that periſh; and it was plainly given us with this intent, that by a due uſe and application thereof we might diſcern truth from error; that which is juſt and fit to be done, or obſerved by us, from that which is not.—Should we, therefore, admit any thing, as a revelation coming from him, which contradicts the evident dictates of our reaſon; we ſacrifice one revelation, that which God gave us with our very beings, to make way for another, which is inconſiſtent with it. It is in effect admitting, that the judgment of our own minds is in no caſe to be depended upon; that the faculties thereof, the very beſt gift which God has given us, are of no uſe and ſervice

to us; no, not even in diſcerning which doctrines come from God, and which do not. For, if I cannot depend upon the plaineſt dictates of reaſon, how can I be aſſured that any doctrine is a revelation from God? If I receive it without conſulting my reaſon, then for ought I know, it may be an impoſture; and I am every way as liable to embrace an error as the truth. But if I embrace it upon the trial and conviction of my reaſon, then it is plain, I admit the principles of reaſon are to be depended upon; which if I do, I cannot conſiſtently admit any thing as true, which contradicts it."

To apply this author's reaſonings, God is frequently ſaid to ſwear;* nay, in both Old and New-Teſtament, to ſwear in wrath.† Now, if we are to admit nothing, that is repugnant to the natural notion we have of God, ought we not to examine by our reaſon, whether God, who has no ſuperior to invoke, can ſwear at all; much leſs be in a paſſion, and ſwear in wrath?

Again, if there are ever ſo many texts, which ſeemingly confine ſalvation to a belief, to which the greateſt part of mankind are utter ſtrangers; or elſe have not had ſufficient reaſon to ſee they were obliged to examine into it; or if they did, could not find out its truth; muſt it not, by this author's reaſoning, be my duty to conſider, whether this is conſiſtent with the character we have from the light of nature, of the impartial and univerſal goodneſs of God, to damn men for impoſſibilities? Or, whether one can be ſaid to be ſent as a ſaviour of mankind, if he comes to ſhut the gates of Heaven againſt thoſe, to whom before they were open; provided they followed the dictates of their reaſon?

If, beſides theſe, there are innumerable texts, which, in the plaineſt manner words can expreſs, impute human parts, human infirmities, and human paſſions, even of the worſt kind, to God; does not this ſuppoſe, that even all have a right to examine; and conſequently, ſufficient underſtanding to judge, when texts, taken in

* Deut. 1. 34. † Pſalms 95. 11. Heb. 3. 11.

their plain, obvious meaning, are, or are not conſiſtent with what the light of nature teaches them the character of the ſupreme being? What notions muſt the vulgar have of God, if the light of nature cannot direct them right, when they find he is ſaid to be jealous and furious?* And God himſelf ſays, My fury ſhall come up in my face, for in my jealouſy, and in the fire of my wrath have I ſpoken:† With a number of other expreſſions of the like nature? Nay, does not the ſcripture, if taken literally, ſuppoſe, that God does things of the greateſt moment in anger and fury? Was it not thus he gave his favorite people ſtatutes, which were not good; and judgments, by which they could not live?‡ And does not St. Peter (to mention no other apoſtle) though a Jew, call the Jewiſh law, given by God, a yoke that neither we or our fore fathers could bear?§ In what a number of places is God ſaid to do things to try people; and yet notwithſtanding this caution, how often is he ſaid to repent? Does he not even repent of the firſt action he did in relation to man? He repented that he made man, and it grieved him at his heart.‖ Nay, does not the ſcripture ſuppoſe he has ſo often repented, that he is weary of repenting?¶ What ſtrange notions muſt the bulk of mankind, could not their reaſon direct them right, have of the ſupreme being, when he is ſaid to have reſted, and to be refreſhed;** and that wine chearеth both God and man?†† And what is yet ſtranger, ſuch actions are attributed to him, as can only belong to the loweſt rank of creatures, ſuch as hiſſing;‡‡ God being in three places of the prophets ſaid to hiſs; and in one place to hiſs for a fly, that is in the uttermoſt part of the river of Egypt;§§ and for a bee, that is in the land of Aſſyria?‖‖

B. Divines tell us, we muſt recede from the letter, when the nature of the thing requires it; that is, when it contains any notion, or fact, which our reaſon tells us

* Nah. 1. 2. † Ezek. 38. 18. 19. ‡ Ezek. 20. 21. 25. § Acts 15 10. ‖ Gen. 6. 6. ¶ Jer. 15. 6. ** Exod. 31. 17. †† Judges 9. 13. ‡‡ Iſa. 5. 26. §§ Zach. 10. 8. ‖‖ Iſa. 7. 18.

is unworthy of God; as being inconſiſtent with his wiſdom, goodneſs, juſtice, immutability, impartial and univerſal benevolence, or any other of his perfections; or any ways claſhes with thoſe duties, that men as men, or creatures of the ſame creator owe their fellow-creatures.

A. I ſhould think that man was unreaſonable, who required a greater ſcope in reading any book, than what theſe divines allow him in reading the ſcripture; eſpecially conſidering the frequent occaſion he will have to exerciſe his reaſoning faculty, in allegoriſing away facts delivered after the plaineſt manner: As for inſtance, if reaſon tells us, that God, the only true God is inviſible, we muſt not interpret thoſe numerous texts literally, which ſuppoſe him to have been ſo often ſeen by mortal eyes: No, not even thoſe which repreſent him for many days together viſible on mount Sinai, where what was under his feet is mentioned; and that the nobles, on whom God laid not his hand, ſaw God, and did eat, and drink.* And biſhop Patrick ſays, "that after they ſaw God, they were ſo far from receiving any harm, that they feaſted with him upon the relics of the peace-offerings, with great joy and gladneſs." And though it is ſaid, God ſpake to Moſes face to face,† as a man does to his friend; yet for the ſame reaſon, that text muſt not be interpreted literally.

B. That is certain, ſince God, in the ſame chapter, ſays to Moſes, Thou canſt not ſee my face; for there ſhall no man ſee me, and live.

A. Does not God immediately add, Behold there is a place by me, and thou ſhalt ſtand upon a rock. And it ſhall come to paſs, while my glory paſſeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock; and I will cover thee with my hand, while I paſs by. And I will take away mine hand, and thou ſhalt ſee my back parts; but my face ſhalt not be ſeen.‖ And ſince reaſon tells us, God has neither fore-parts, or back-parts, muſt not the

* Exod. 24. 10. 11. † Exod. 33. 11. ‖ Ver. 21, 22, 23.

rock, the clift of the rock, and the hand that covered Moſes in this clift, and the back parts ſeen upon taking away the hand, be underſtood by men of the meaneſt capacity, in a ſpiritual ſenſe?

According to the acknowledged maxims, you have laid down from divines, we muſt not take literally the two conferences mentioned in the firſt and ſecond of Job between God and ſatan; when ſatan, in very good company, with the ſons of God, preſented himſelf before the Lord; who, when ſatan would not otherwiſe be ſatisfied of Job's integrity, permitted him to ſlay Job's children and ſervants, and reduce him to the extremity to make the experiment. The ſame may be ſaid of the Lord's ſaying at another time to ſatan, ſtanding at the right hand of the angel of the Lord, to reſiſt the high prieſt Joſhua, ſtanding likewiſe before him, the Lord rebuke thee, O ſatan:* And muſt we not think it as unworthy of God to talk to a ſerpent as to ſatan? Or, how can we conceive a ſerpent could talk to Eve, and delude the mother of mankind, though in the high ſtate of perfection; even though the apoſtle ſays, The ſerpent deceived Eve by his ſubtilty.†

Some would be almoſt apt to imagine, that the author of the book of Geneſis thought, that words had ideas naturally fixed to them, and not by conſent: Otherwiſe, ſay they, how can we account for his ſuppoſing, that God brought all animals before Adam, as ſoon as he was created, to give them names; and that whatſoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof;‡ and that the ſerpent and Eve, almoſt as ſoon as created, entertained one another in the ſame language? And ſome think, that this author did not know the reaſon of the neceſſary variety of language upon the increaſe of mankind, by making God to come down to the city and tower, whoſe top was deſigned to reach to Heaven; and then ſaying, this they begin to do; and now nothing will be reſtrained from them, which they

* Zech. iii. 1. 2. † 2 Cor. xi. 3. ‡ Gen. ii. 19.

have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound the language.* And, perhaps, the not knowing the natural cauſe of the rain-bow, occaſioned that account we have in Geneſis of its inſtitution.

As to the ſtory of an angel of God's wreſtling all night with Jacob, and then laming and bleſſing him, and changing his name; "Interpreters of note, whether Jews or Chriſtians" (as Mr. Nye obſerves) "underſtood it done, not in fact, but in viſion only:" Though one would imagine the Jews thought it literally true, becauſe the text ſays, they eat not of the ſinew; that ſinew, which ſhrank, unto this very day.†

What a number of ideas muſt Balaam's aſs have to be able to reaſon with his maſter; when he ſaw, and knew an angel: And though it is ſaid by Peter, that the dumb aſs ſpeaking with man's voice, forbad the madneſs of the prophet;‡ yet in the ſtory itſelf, there does not appear any thing like madneſs: For that prophet did nothing but what the Lord enjoined him; and declares though Balak would give him his houſe full of ſilver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, my God. And when he went to Balaam's ſecond meſſenger, it was by the expreſs command of God; and yet the text ſays, God's anger was kindled becauſe he went:§ And then follows the dialogue between the aſs and his maſter.

How many commands did God give his prophets, which, if taken according to the letter, ſeem unworthy of God, as making them act like mad-men or idiots? As for inſtance, the prophet Iſaiah walked for three years together naked for a ſign.‖ Jeremiah is commanded to carry his girdle as far as Euphrates, and there to bury it in the hole of a rock; and after many days he is ſent to dig it up again.¶ So he is commanded to make bands and yokes, and put them about his neck, and to ſend them to ſeveral kings. Ezekiel is commanded by

* Gen. xi. 4, 6, 7. xxxii. 24, 25, 28, 29. † Ver. 32. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 16. § Num. xxii. 22. ‖ Iſa. xx. 2. ¶ Jer. xiii. 4, 6. xxvii. 2, 3.

the Lord to draw Jeruſalem on a tile, and lay ſiege to it, build a fort againſt it, ſet a camp againſt it, and ſet battering rams againſt it round about. Moreover to take an iron pan, and ſet it for a wall of iron between him and the city: And immediately after he is commanded, to lie three hundred and ninety days on one ſide, and forty days on the other; and then to mix man's dung with his bread. And afterwards the Lord ſaid, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung. Another time he is commanded to dig a hole through the wall of his houſe, and carry forth his goods in the twilight, and cover his face, as not to ſee the ground.* And as St. John was commanded to eat a book;† ſo the prophet was commanded to eat a roll; and likewiſe to ſhip his hair,‡ and to diſpoſe of the clippings § after a very odd manner; and ſeveral other things as ſtrange, too many here to mention. And the prophet Hoſea, who was like a prieſt, was bid to take a wife of whoredoms;‖ (though that by Moſes law was forbid a prieſt,) and children of whoredoms; and had three children by his wife, to whom the Lord himſelf gave names.

No mathematician could give a more exact deſcription of a city, than John does of that great city, the holy Jeruſalem; which from an high mountain he ſaw deſcending out of Heaven from God; and he was ſo near it, as to deſcribe the gates, walls and ſtreets; and to meaſure its length, breadth and heighth with a reed.¶ And Tertullian aſſures us, "that in his time there was been for forty days together, a city hanging in the air over Judea." And yet interpreters have ſince allegoriſed this great city into a mere caſtle in the air. But,

To come to things of greater moment, did not the ſcripture ſuppoſe reaſon was able to teach men of the meaneſt capacity, that God could not be deceived himſelf, or deceive us; the prophet Jeremiah would not

* Ezek. iv. 1, 2, 3, 4. iv. 12, 15. xii. 5, 6. † Rev. x. 9. ‡ Ezek. iii. 1. 3. v. 1, 2. § Hoſ. i. 1, &c. ‖ Lev. xxi. 14. ¶ Rev. xxi. 10, &c.

have ſaid, O Lord, thou haſt deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art ſtronger than I, and haſt prevailed. —Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?* And in another prophet the Lord ſays, The days are prolonged, and every viſion fails. And though the Lord adds, Thus ſhall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have ſpoken ſhall be done; yet he afterwards ſays, If the prophet be deceived when he hath ſpoken a thing, I, the Lord have deceived that prophet.† And if the prophet is deceived, muſt not the people, who rely on that prophet, be deceived? And does not the prophet Jeremiah ſay, Ah! Lord God, ſurely thou haſt greatly deceived this people?‡ And to the ſame purpoſe the prophet Iſaiah, O Lord thou haſt made us to err.§

There are other texts which go farther, and, if taken literally, repreſent God not only as falſifying his word, but his oaths. To mention two, the firſt relates to the children of Iſrael, to whom the Lord ſaid, Ye ſhall not come into the land concerning which I ſware to make you dwell; and ye ſhall know my breach of promiſe.‖ The ſecond is in Pſalm 89, in the firſt part of which is largely ſet forth the promiſes of God to David by covenant and oath; and in the other part David complains of God's breach, both of his covenant and his oath; and in ſumming up thoſe breaches he ſays, Thou haſt made void the covenant of thy ſervant: Lord, where are thy former loving kindneſſes which thou ſweareſt to David in thy truth?¶ And there are ſeveral facts mentioned in ſcripture, which, if taken literally, look as though the prophets were either deceived themſelves, or were willing to deceive others. [*Jeremiah propheſies, king Zedekiah ſhould die in peace; and yet the poor king had his ſons ſlain before his eyes, and his eyes then put out, bound in chains, and died in priſon. And

* Jer. xx. 7. xv. 18. † Ezek. xii. 22, 28. xiv. 9
‡ Jer. iv. 10. § Iſa. lxiii. 17. ‖ Num. xiv. 30, 34.
¶ Pſalm lxxxix. 39. 49.

though he propheſied that Jehoiachim ſhould be buried with the burial of an aſs, drawn, and caſt forth beyond the gates of Jeruſalem; yet this does not at all agree with what is related of him in the laſt chapter of the ſecond book of Kings, or even in the laſt chapter of Jeremiah.*] The propheteſs Hilda aſſures good king Joſiah from the Lord, that he ſhould be gathered to his grave in peace; and yet ſoon after he received a mortal wound,† of which he died. The prophet Eliſha ſends word to Benhadad, the king of Syria, who conſults him about his recovery, that he may, (or rather ſhall, or will, for ſo it ought to be rendered) certainly recover; yet he tells Hazael, who had a deſign on his crown and life and who before had been anointed king of Syria, by the prophet Elijah) that he ſhould ſurely die.‡ And this looked the more ungrateful in the prophet, becauſe he had received forty camel loads of the good things of Damaſcus, to tell the king the truth.§ But I need not mention ſingle prophets deceiving, or being deceived, when the ſcripture tells us of four hundred being deceived at once, to the deſtruction of a number of innocent perſons. I ſaw, ſays the prophet Micaiah, the Lord ſitting upon his throne, and all the hoſt of Heaven ſtanding on his right hand, and on his left. And the Lord ſaid, who ſhall entice Ahab, king of Iſrael, that he may go up, and fall at Ramoth gilead? And one ſpake, ſaying after this manner, and another ſaying after that manner. Then there came out a ſpirit, and ſtood before the Lord, and ſaid, I will entice him. And the Lord ſaid unto him, wherewith? And he ſaid I will go out, and be a lying ſpirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord ſaid, thou ſhalt entice him, and thou ſhalt alſo prevail. Go out, and do even ſo.‖

As to the new teſtament, I ſhall now only obſerve that though St. Jude, 9. 12. quotes (beſides the aſſump-

* Jer. xxxiv. 5. lii. 10, 11. xxii. 19. † 2 Chron. xxxiv. 28. xxxv. 23. ‡ 1 Kings xix. 15. § 2 Kings viii. 8, 9. ‖ 1 Chron. xviii. 5. 12. 2 Chron. 5. 18. 21, 22.

tion of Moſes) a prophecy of Enoch, the ſeventh from Adam, and the book containing this prophecy was then in being; yet, becauſe there were things in it, which ſeemed unworthy of God, and could not be well allegorized; the authority of an inſpired perſon quoting it as an inſpired book, could not ſupport its credit, but it fell into contempt, and was loſt.

B. Though you allow reaſon to be the proper judge in things of mortality, as falling under its cognizance; yet as to propheſies, you muſt own, we are entirely to rely on authority.

A. I have hitherto ſaid nothing in relation to propheſies, deſigning to ſpeak of them at another ſeaſon; but ſince you mention them, I muſt, as to the propheſies in the old teſtament, confeſs my ignorance, that I do not underſtand them; and divines themſelves, as far as I can find, are infinitely divided about interpreting them: and as to theſe propheſies, if they may be ſo called, in the new teſtament relating to the ſecond coming of Chriſt, and the end of the world, the beſt interpreters and commentators own, the apoſtles themſelves were groſsly miſtaken; there ſcarce being an epiſtle, but where they foretell that thoſe times they wrote in, were *tempora noviſſima*; and the then age the laſt age, and thoſe days the laſt days; and that the end of the world was nigh, and the coming of Chriſt at hand, as is plain, among other texts, from Cor. x. 11. Rom. xiii. 11, 12. Heb. ix. 26. Jam. v. 7, 8. 1 John ii. 18. 2 Pet. iii. 12, 13. And they do not aſſert this as a mere matter of ſpeculation, but build motives and arguments upon it, to excite people to the practiſe of piety, and all good works; as Phil. iv. 5. let your moderation be known to all men, the lord is at hand. And to the ſame purpoſe are Heb. x. 24, 25. 1 Pet. iv. 7, 8. 1 Cor. vii. 29. 2 Pet. iii. 11, 12. and though they do not pretend to tell the very day and hour, when theſe things muſt happen; yet they thought it would be during their time, and continually expected it. Timothy is charged to keep this commandment—till the

coming of the lord.* So Paul says, to the corinthians, as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the lords death till he comes.† And I think, it is plain, Paul himself expected to be alive at the coming of the lord, and that he had the word of God for it. For this we say unto you by the word of the lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep.—The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.‡ And there are other texts to the same purpose, as 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. 2 Cor. v. 4.

B. Does not St. Paul suppose, that before the coming of Christ, Antichrist must appear.§

A. That does not in the least hinder, but he might believe both would happen in his time; for, says he, the mystery of iniquity does already work. And St. John puts this matter out of dispute, in saying, little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now there are many Antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.‖

B. Does not St. Peter say, there shall come in the last day, scoffers.——Saying, where is the promise of his coming?¶

A. Saint Peter owns those to be the last days, and the promise of his then coming he confirms, by saying, God is not slack concerning his promise, the day of the lord will come as a thief in the night;—What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for, and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being all on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent

* 1 Tim. vi. 13, 14. † 1 Cor. xi. 26. ‡ 1 Thes. iv. 15, 16, 17, 18. § 2 Thes. ii. 3. 7. ‖ 1 John ii. 18. ¶ 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

heat: nevertheleſs we, according to his promiſe, look for new heavens, and a new earth. *

B. Does not St. Peter ſay, behold be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the lord as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day? †

A. This, as in the margin, ſeems to be quoted from pſalm xc. 4. where it is ſaid, a thouſand years in thy ſight, are but as yeſterday when it is paſt. And ſurely St. Peter could not imagine, that God effected to ſpeak unintelligibly; and by one day meant a thouſand years; and by a thouſand years one day; and refer to this place for proof.

B. Divines are at a loſs how to account for the apoſtles ſo frequently declaring, the end of all things are at hand, and Chriſt to be then coming; when our ſaviour ſays, of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the angels in heaven, but my father only. ‡

A. Thoſe divines would not make theſe reflections, did they but conſider what our ſaviour declares to his diſciples, when they came to him privately; ſaying, tell us when theſe things ſhall be; and what ſhall be the ſign of thy coming, and of the end of the world. Does he not in anſwer to their queſtion tell them what thoſe ſigns would be? withal adding, ſo likewiſe ye, when ye ſhall ſee all thoſe things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily, I ſay unto you, this generation ſhall not paſs, till all theſe things be fulfilled. And to aſſure them of the truth of what he declares, heaven and earth, ſays he, ſhall paſs away; but my words ſhall not paſs away. And his adding, but of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my father only; was not meant to contradict what he juſt before declared, that this generation ſhall not paſs till theſe things be fulfilled; § but to warn his diciples not to be ſurpriſed, as the old world was, when the flood came and ſwept them all away; watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour

* 2 Pet. iii. 9,—13. † Ver. 8. ‡ Mat. xxiv. 36.
§ Ver. 3. 33, 34. 35. 36.

ne lord will come: but know this, that if the good man f the houſe had known in what watch the thief would ave come, he would have watched.*—And the apoſtles, greeable to this admonition of the Lord, ſay, yourſelves now perfectly, that the day of the Lord cometh as a hief in the night.† And after the reſurrection, our ſavour ſays to Peter, who aſks him concerning the beloved iſciple; If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that o thee?‡ and the laſt thing his diſciples aſked him on his aſcenſion is, wilt thou at this time reſtore again the kingdom to Iſrael?§ and the anſwer he gave them is very conſiſtent with the kingdom, even the temporal kingdom of Iſrael's being reſtored again during their lives. And by our ſaviour's ſaying when the laſt ſupper was ended, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until hat day I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.¶ They, no doubt, believed this happy time was not far off. But,

If moſt of the apoſtles, from what motives ſoever, were miſtaken in a matter of this conſequence; how can we be abſolutely certain, that any one of them may not be miſtaken in any other matter? If they were not inſpired in what they ſaid in their writings concerning the then coming of Chriſt; how could they be inſpired in thoſe arguments they build on a foundation far from being ſo? and if they thought their times were the laſt, no direction they gave, could be intended to reach further than their own times. And if John the evangeliſt, and John the divine, are the ſame perſon, he muſt believe what is mentiond in the revelation, would have happened within the compaſs of that age in which he writ. But leaving theſe matters to another time, let us return to the conſideration of thoſe duties, which reaſon ſhews us from the nature of God and man, and the relation men ſtand in to him, and one another.

As I have already ſhewn you by a number of inſtan-

* Mat. xxiv. 42. † 2 Pet. iii. 10 ‡ John xxi. 22
§ Acts i. 6. ¶ Mat. xxvi. 29.

ces where divines themſelves own, that though the literal ſenſe of the ſcripture be ever ſo plain, yet it muſt not ſtand in competition with what our reaſon tells us of the nature and perfections of God; ſo I ſhall now ſhew you the ſame in relation to thoſe duties men owe to one another; and that if men are not well grounded in the reaſon and nature of things, and from thence judge of their duty, in relation to one another; there are things either commanded, or approved of in ſcripture, which might be apt to lead men aſtray. A man who looks no further than that, might think it no crime to cheat his elder brother, impoſe on his aged parent, and by a lie obtain his bleſſing; nay hope that God would confirm it, when he ſees how Jacob obtained the greateſt bleſſing from God.

If men flatter themſelves that they are true Iſraelites, and thoſe of a different religion mere Egyptians; will they not be apt to imagine, when they ſee how the Iſraelites ſpoiled the Egyptians by the command of God himſelf, who made them borrow what they were not to repay; that this might be a good precedent for them?

B. I muſt own, that a command to lend, hoping for nothing again; and a command to borrow, without returning any thing again, ſeem to be very different commands.*

A. When men find the harlot Rahab celebrated, even in the new teſtament, for lying to the government, and betraying her country to its moſt cruel enemies;† [and as ſome think, miraculouſly ſaved with all her kindred, by her houſe ſtanding in which they were, when the wall, on which it was, and in which ſhe dwelt, fell flat.‡] are they not in danger, if they find their advantage in it, and it is for the ſervice of thoſe they judge to be true Israelites, to do the ſame? it is not pretended the harlot had more ſpecial command for ſo doing, than Jael had for an act of the higheſt treachery; for which, becauſe it ſerved the intereſt of Iſrael, ſhe is declared by the propheteſs Deborah to be bleſſed above all other women.§

What prince can ever want a pretence of going to war;

* Exod. iii. 21, 22, † Heb. xi. 31. ‡ Joſh. ii. 15. § Judg. v. 24

and totally extirpating thoſe he invades; when he ſees Saul was commanded by God to deſtroy the Amelekites, men, women, infants and ſucklings, ox and ſheep, camel and aſs, for an injury done four hundred years before? And how, for ſparing Agag, (whom Samuel hewed in pieces before the Lord;) and preſerving ſome of the cattle for ſacrifice, the Lord rejected him from being king; nay, ordered Samuel, leſt Saul ſhould ſuſpect the deſign, to pretend a ſacrifice, when he ſent him to anoint David?*

Would not people, if, like the children of Iſrael, they were deſtitute of an habitation, be apt to think what the Iſraelites did to the Canaanites, a good precedent; and that they might invade a neighboring, idolatrous nation, that never did them the leaſt harm; and extirpate not only men and women, but even their innocent infants, in order to get poſſeſſion of their country? And I queſtion, whether the Spaniards would have murdered ſo many millions in the Indies, had they not thought they might have uſed them like Canaanites.

How many precedents, beſides that of Ehud, (who, on a meſſage from the Lord, ſtabbed the king to whom his people ſent him with a preſent) did the Popiſh prieſts plead from the Old Teſtament, for the aſſaſſination of the two Henries of France? And had the gun-powder-plot ſucceeded here, they would, no doubt, have made uſe of the ſame plea to juſtify it.†

Though the Lord bids the Jews to pray for the peace of Babylon, whither he had cauſed them to be carried away captives; and that in the peace thereof they ſhould have peace;‡ yet is it not ſaid in the Pſalms, O daughter of Babylon, happy ſhall he be, who taketh, and daſheth thy little ones againſt the ſtones? And this for no other reaſon, but becauſe ſhe deſired of her captives one of the ſongs of Zion.§

The holier men in the Old Teſtament are repreſented,

* 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3, 9, &c. xvi. 2, &c. † Jud. iii. 15, 20, 21. ‡ Jer. xxix. 7. § Pſa. cxxxvii. 8, 9. 3.

the more cruel they ſeem to be, as well as more addicted to curſing: How plentifully does David in the 109th Pſalm beſtow the bittereſt curſes on his enemies? And how cruelly did he treat the Ammonites, when he took their cities, cutting the people with ſaws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes?*

Who is not ſurpriſed to find the holy prophet Eliſha curſing in the name of the Lord, little children; for calling him bald pate? And what is ſtill more ſurpriſing, Two ſhe-bears, upon his curſing, ſtrait devoured forty-two little children.

And he likewiſe entailed the curſe of leproſy on his man Gehazi, and his ſeed for ever; for accepting, without his maſter's knowledge, a ſmall preſent from Naaman, the Aſſyrian; though the prophet himſelf afterwards took forty camel loads of the good things of Damaſcus,† to tell their king the truth, in relation to his recovery; and yet deceived him.

Elijah's cauſing fire to come down from Heaven, to deſtroy two captains with their companies, for no other fault but bluntly delivering a meſſage from the king; and perhaps, in the very words they were commanded: was not ſo cruel, as his hindering it from raining upon the earth for the ſpace of three years and ſix months;‡ ſince a drought of that continuance, without dew or rain in ſuch a barren country as Judæa, muſt have, without miracles, deſtroyed every thing; and yet St. James from hence takes occaſion to recommend the efficacy of prayer.

If God will not, in this life, miraculouſly alter the courſe of things for the ſake of the innocent, he certainly, will not do it for the guilty; nor break in upon the ordinary methods and laws of his providence, to puniſh one man for the crime of another; the innocent for the guilty. If God could act thus, it would be no crime in man to imitate him; nay, how could we

* 1 Chron. xx. 3. † 2 Kings ii. 23, 24. v. 27. viii. 9, &c. ‡ Jam. v. 17.

be ſure, if God deals thus with his creatures in this life, he will not act ſo in the life to come; ſince if the eternal rules of juſtice are once broke, how can we imagine any ſtop? And yet,

Are there not examples in Scripture, which taken in their literal ſenſe, ſeem to make God break in upon the common courſe of nature, and the ordinary rules of his providence, to puniſh men for crimes they are not guilty of? as God's cauſing, in the latter end of David's reign, a famine for three years together, for the crime of Saul and his bloody houſe, in ſlaying the Gibeonites:* and that God ſmote Iſrael, and deſtroyed ſeventy thouſand of them for David's fault: in cauſing the innocent ſheep, as he juſtly calls them, to be numbered.

B. I believe there muſt be ſome miſtake in this laſt ſtory; for is it not fit, for ſeveral important reaſons, that kings ſhould know the numbers of their people? Are they not the ſtrength and riches of their kingdom? and was not the people of Iſrael, by being frequently numbered, and ſometimes by God's own appointment, a good precedent for David? but paſſing that by, how can we reconcile this ſtory with itſelf? in one place it is ſaid God moved David to number Iſrael:† in another Satan provoked David.‡ Did God conſpire with ſatan in this act, in order to deſtroy a number of innocent perſons? but do theſe two places any more agree in the account Joab gives in of the number of the people? nay, if in the begining of Saul's reign,§ the numbers were rightly calculated; it is morally impoſſible, to ſay nothing of the deſtruction made by continual war, that either account ſhould be true. Beſides,

Can God change his mind, and ſuddenly too? Yet it is ſaid, God ſent an angel to deſtroy Jeruſalem: and while the Lord beheld, and repented him of the evil.

* 2 Sam. xxi. 1. † xxiv. 1. ‡ 1 Chron. xxi. 1
§ 1 Sam. xi. 8.

And can any one think this to be a mere Peſtilence, when a real angel is ſaid to be miraculouſly ſent to execute God's anger? And David, with the elders of Iſrael, fell on their faces, and ſaw the angel of the Lord ſtand between the earth and the heavens, having a drawn ſword in his hand, by the threſhing floor of Ornan the Jebuſite; and is there commanded to build an Altar.*

A. What you ſay may be true, ſince there are ſeveral miſtakes crept into the old teſtiment; where there is ſcarce a chapter, which gives any hiſtorical account of matters; but there are ſome things in it, which could not be there originally; and even in this book of Chronicles, there are things mentioned, too late to be inſerted by Ezra, or Nehemiah. And I might add, that the Jewiſh Hiſtory being for the moſt part taken from larger accounts, it is no wonder its abſtracts are not always very exact.

I could give you many more inſtances of this nature, but I am afraid ſome will think theſe to many, though I have ſaid nothing, but what Archbiſhop Tillotſon does in effect, in affirming, "The difference between "the ſtyle of the old and new teſtament is ſo very re- "markable, that one of the greateſt ſects in the premi- "tive times did, upon this very ground, found their "hereſy of two Gods. The one evil, fierce and cruel, "whom they called the God of the old teſtament; "the other good, kind, and merciful, whom they cal- "led the God of the new teſtament; ſo great a dif- "ference is their between the repreſentations, which are "made of God in the books of the Jewiſh and chriſ- "tian religion, as to give, at leaſt, ſome colour, and "pretence for an Imagination of two Gods." But,

It muſt be owned, that the ſame ſpirit, (I dare not call it a ſpirit of cruelty) does not alike prevail throughout the Old Teſtament; the nearer we come to the times of the goſpel, the milder it appeared: for

* 1 Chron. xxi. 15, 16, 18.

though God declares in the decalogue, that he is a jealous God, viſiting the iniquity of the parents upon their children, to the third and fourth generation;* and accordingly Achan, with all his family, was deſtroyed for his ſingle crime; yet the Lord afterwards ſays, The ſoul that ſinneth, it ſhall die; the ſon ſhall not bear the iniquity of the father, &c.† *[Though before it was plain the ſon did, by God's declaring to Abraham, that the uncircumciſed man-child, was to be cut off from his people:‡ Yet it does not appear any puniſhment was to be inflicted on his parents for not circumciſing him.]

Our ſaviour, by ſaying, He came not to deſtroy the lives of men, but to ſave them; condemns their taking away the lives of any, except in defence of their own, and of what is neceſſary for their ſupport; and this he declares, upon a moſt remarkable occaſion: Some of his diſciples, upon his not being received into a Samaritan village, becauſe his face was towards Jeruſalem, ſtrait cried, Wilt thou we command fire from Heaven, and conſume them, as Elias did? He rebuked them, and ſaid, ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of; for the ſon of man is not come to deſtroy the lives of men, but to ſave them.§ If any precedent might have been pleaded from the Old Teſtament, it would, no doubt, have been Elias, the fore-runner of our ſaviour; who came from Heaven (to which he went up by a whirlwind in a charriot of fire, with horſes of fire)‖ to meet our ſaviour on a high mountain.

And if it be contrary to the ſpirit of the goſpel, even to wiſh to imitate that great prophet ſo favored of God; the ſame will hold as ſtrongly, in relation to all the actions that are of a like nature of other holy men, though quoted with approbation in the New Teſtament; as Moſes is, for acting the part of a magiſtrate, when a private man, in deſtroying his fellow ſubject. And if there is

* Joſh. vii. 24. † Ezek. xviii. 20. ‡ Gen. xvii. 14.
§ Luke ix. 54, 55, 56. ‖ 2 Kings ii. 11.

a contraſt between the ſpirit of the Old, and the ſpirit of the New Teſtament, ought not we chriſtians to ſtick to the latter; and not ſuppoſe the texts, which require doing good even to the Gentiles, and dealing with them as ourſelves expect to be dealt with, to relate to Chriſtians only before they had power to act otherwiſe; and that after, they were to be governed by precedents from the Old Teſtament?

B. Are there any ſo abſurd, as to endeavor thus to reconcile the Old and New Teſtament?

A. We find the Orthodox, as ſoon as they had a prince, who refuſed ſubmiſſion to their deciſions in the council of Nice, in expreſs terms owned as much.

Lucifer Claritanus, then a moſt orthodox biſhop, in ſeveral diſcourſes addreſſed the ſon of Conſtantine the great, does not ſcruple to tell the emperor himſelf, that it was the duty of the orthodox to kill him, an account of his arianiſm, which he calls idolatry: and for this he quotes Deut. xiii. 6. and 1 Maccab. i 43. to verſe 29th of chap. ii. and then inſultingly ſays, "if you had been in the hands of Matthias or Phineas, they would have killed you. You ſay you ſuffer deſpiteful uſage from us, contrary to admonitions of holy ſcripture.——If ever any one of the worſhippers of God ſpared apoſtates, let what you ſay of us be true.——Pray ſhew me but one of them, that ever ſpared the adverſaries of his religion." And the texts for obedience to magiſtrates from Titus iii. 1. he evades, by ſaying, "That the apoſtles ſpoke of thoſe princes and magiſtrates, who as yet had not believed in the holy ſon of God; that they by our humility, and meekneſs, and ſuffering long under adverſity, and all poſſible obedience in things fitting, might be won over to Chriſtianity."

Athanaſius, and the confeſſors that were with him, highly applaud Lucifer's diſcourſes, and ſays, "We plainly ſee the picture of an apoſtle, the boldneſs of a prophet, the magiſtery of truth, the doctrine of true faith.——You ſeem to be the true temple of our ſaviour, who dwelling in you, ſpeaks theſe things by you.

"Believe me, Lucifer, you alone did not say these things, but the holy ghost with you; how came you to remember scripture at that rate? How came you to understand the sense and meaning of it so perfectly; if the holy ghost had not assisted you in it?"

They, who design a new religion, in opposition to established ones, would, no doubt, as these fathers suppose, begin with precepts of the greatest humanity and tenderness, and doing the utmost good to mankind, though of ever so different persuasions: But to think, as these fathers then did, (and the orthodox, if we judge from their actions, have ever since thought;) that all the precepts of the gospel of this nature was designed only to draw Jews and gentiles into the church, as gallants gain their mistresses by obsequiousness; and that after they are once in, the church (as all sects and parties term themselves) had a right to murder, not only private persons, but even their sovereigns, for not holding the orthodox faith; and that this is the only way to reconcile the Old and New Testament, is a notion highly injurious to the Christian religion.

It is, no doubt, the interest of the wicked priests, to have God represented under opposite characters; and to give in one testament rules contrary to those in the other; that they, as it serves their turn, may make use of either: But is it not astonishing for saints and confessors, upon the first occasion, to renounce their former principles; and in defiance of their oaths of allegiance, represent a man inspired by the holy ghost, and say, that Christ spoke in him; when he declares it the duty of Christians to murder an heretical emperor?

B. Those holy fathers, I suppose, thought they saw things of the greatest consequence, though commanded in the Old, forbidden in the New Testament; and that to make the Old and New Testament to contradict each other in these things, was to destroy the authority of both; and therefore concluded, this experiment was the only way to support both.

A. By reasoning thus, instead of reconciling both,

they deſtroyed both, and natural religion too; in ſuppoſing things are not good and evil in themſelves; but that all depends on the will of an arbitrary being, which might endleſsly change. But,

If there is a law of nature, with the obſerving of which God cannot diſpenſe either in himſelf, or in his creatures; and no religion can be true, that in the minuteſt circumſtances is contrary to its righteouſneſs; and the goſpel inculcates all ſuch preceqts of natural religion, as require doing good to Jew and Gentile, even the ſame we expect from them; and that we are indiſpenſably bound to allow all others the ſame right of judging for themſelves, as we claim for ourſelves; muſt we not, if we will ſupport the credit of the Old Teſtament, ſuppoſe it to contain nothing inconſiſtent with this natural right confirmed by the goſpel? If this be not ſo, pray ſhew me my miſtake; but if it be juſt reaſoning, tell me how you can account for the conduct of the jews. in invading, and that too, without any declaration of war, the Canaanites, a free and independent nation, and againſt whom they had not the leaſt cauſe of complaint; and on pretence of their being idolaters, deſtroying not only the men and women, but infants incapable of idolatry. or any other crime? This, you know, has given great advantage to the enemies of our religion, who repreſent the whole proceeding, as an unparallelled piece of injuſtice and cruelty; and therefore, I ſhould be glad to know what our divines, if they do not interpret this fact allegorically, or as only done in viſion, ſay, to ſhew it is not contrary to the law of nature, and thoſe precepts of the goſpel which are founded on it.

B. I wonder you can be ignorant, with what eaſe our divines ſolve this ſeeming difficulty, by having recourſe to a poſitive command for treating the Canaanites as they did.

A. Is not ſuch a command pleaded in vain, except it can be ſhewn, that the thing ſuppoſed to be commanded, is not inconſiſtent with the law of nature? Which

if God can diſpenſe with in any one caſe, he may in all; nor could his wiſdom then preſcribe any certain rule of conduct, either for himſelf or his creatures; but all would depend on an uncertain, fluctuating, arbitrary will.

B. May not a thing, which is unlawful for men to do of themſelves, become lawful, by the command of the ſupreme being?

A. Suppoſe any ſhould now plead that they had a divine commiſſion to deſtroy their next neighbors, whom they judge to be idolaters, man, woman and child, in order to poſſes their country; would not our divines ſay, no man could be as certain he had any ſuch poſſitive command from God, as he was that God had forbid it him by the light of nature? Nor could miracles be a proof of any ſuch commiſſion; ſince we can only know from the nature of the things themſelves, whether miracles are done by a good, or evil being; and we are to compare what we are told of God, with what we know of him; otherwiſe we believe in men, and not in God. And if the light of nature, (the voice of God himſelf) teaches us, even to demonſtration, that God is infinitely wiſe and good; does it not likewiſe demonſtrate, that no command, not ſtamped with theſe characters, can come from him; much leſs a command inconſiſtent with all thoſe duties that men as men owe to one another?

B. May not God puniſh ſome wicked nations with death, to fright others from committing the ſame crimes?

A. Has not God a thouſand ways of doing this, without commanding men to do any thing, which, by the law of nature, he had forbid them? And if God deſigned what he did to be a terror to others, would he not act after ſuch a ſignal, and ſupernatural manner, as all ſhould ſee it was his own doing; and the reaſon of his ſo doing: And in order to ſhew it, diſtinguiſh between the guilty, and the innocent?

If God would puniſh the Canaanites, for acting con-

trary to the law of nature; would he, in order to do this, require the Iſraelites to act contrary to the ſame law; in murdering men, women and children, that never did them the leaſt injury?

Beſides, were not the Jews, conſidering their circumſtances upon their coming out of Egypt, the moſt improper people to convince the world, that they did not act out of a private intereſt; but purely to execute the vengeance of God on an idolatrous nation? Would God, in ſuch a caſe, chooſe people as prone to idolatry as the Canaanites themſelves? Some queſtion, whether in this caſe, the plea of a divine command, if taken literally, will not deſtroy all the internal proofs of the falſehood of any religion; for can that, ſay they, which is conſiſtent with the truth of any one true religion, prove another religion to be falſe? And do not all our divines, when they are ſpeaking againſt other religions, maintain, that their commanding, or approving any thing contrary to the law of nature, is a demonſtration of their falſehood? ſince it deſtroys all the internal proofs of the truth of any religion, and confounds all the eſſential marks, by which we diſcern good from evil; and ſuppoſes God may command a ſon to ſacrifice his father; or do any thing, though ever ſo repugnant to the light of nature.

B. Theſe men carry their reaſonings too far; for has not providence frequently made uſe of ill men, not only to puniſh ill men, but for other good purpoſes?

A. In the courſe of things it cannot but happen, that ſome ill men may be a ſcorge to others; yet that cannot excuſe them, if in ſo doing they act againſt the eternal rules of juſtice and equity. Though a thing may be ſaid to be done by the determinate counſel of God, yet that will not juſtify, or excuſe thoſe that did it, if not conſiſtent with the law of nature. St. Peter, ſpeaking of the holy child Jeſus, ſays,——The people of Iſrael were gathered together, for to do whatſoever thy hand, and thy counſel determined before to be done: *

* Acts iv. 27, 28.

And yet were not they, and their poſterity puniſhed for that fact, which God's hand and counſel had determined ſhould be done? Beſides,

If the Iſraelites had a divine commiſſion to extirpate the Canaanites, ought not the Canaanites to have known it, to prevent their reſiſting men acting by a divine commiſſion? Otherwiſe would their not be two oppoſite rights at the ſame time; a right in the Jews by revelation, to take away the lives of the Canaanites; and a right in the Canaanites by the law of nature, to defend their lives?

B. Was not the ſun's ſtanding ſtill for a whole day together, at the command of Joſhua,* that he migh have light enough to deſtroy his enemies, a ſufficient proof they ought to have offered up their throats?

A. That did not happen till they were defeated before Gibeon; and conſequently till then, it could be no direction to them; and even after that, the lord hardened their hearts, that they ſhould come againſt Iſrael in battle; and though it is ſaid, that the living God is among you, and that he will not fail to drive out before you the Canaanites, &c. yet Iſrael could not drive them out of ſeveral places: and in one inſtance, it is ſaid, the lord was with Judah, and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, becauſe they had chariots of iron.†

A reverend author, to ſolve the difficulties attending this matter, ſays, "the critics and rabins take notice, that it is not ſaid by the hiſtorian, that Joſhua commanded the ſun and moon to ſtand ſtill; but he recites the words of a certain book (ſuppoſed to be a poem written by one Jaſher) in which the poet, becauſe of the great and long ſlaughter, that Joſhua made of the Amorites, introduces Joſhua, as requiring the ſun and moon to ſtand ſtill while he and his army deſtroyed the enemies of the lord. Which indeed, was an elgant fiction, and very proper in a poem that was written on ſuch an occaſion.

* Joſh. x. 12, 13. † Judges i. 19

And now let me ask you, whether the very indeavoring to reconcile this, or any other fact mentioned in the Old Teſtament, with the light of nature and the evangelical precepts, is not a plain confeſſion what men ought to think of them, if they could not be reconciled, as no doubt they can; and that we are to uſe our reaſon, in judging of the actions of the moſt celebrated perſons of old? elſe, to give no other inſtances, than the tranſactions of Judah and Tamar, we might approve the ſtratagem, in getting to lie with her father-in-law: for though before he knew himſelf to be a man, he was reſolved to burn her; yet after he cried, She has been more righteous than I:* And for this righteouſneſs ſhe was bleſſed with twins, from whom the noble houſe of Judah, with all its kings, and the Meſſiah himſelf was deſcended.

I think, I could not ſay leſs than I have, in vindication of the precepts of the goſpel; by ſhewing that they were not deſigned merely to draw people into the profeſſion of the Chriſtian religion, and then to be laid aſide; except where they ſerved the intereſt of the local orthodoxy: But that they are rules in their own nature obligatory, which from their internal excellency, always bound mankind; and conſequently, all men, even thoſe of the meaneſt abilities, muſt have been capable of knowing them; and out of danger, were it not their own fault, of being miſled by any recedents whatever.

If what has been already ſaid, may not be ſufficient to ſhew, that it cannot be imputed to want of wiſdom, or goodneſs in God; or to any defect in reaſon, which he has at all times given mankind for the diſcovery of his will: that the nature of religion is ſo little underſtood, and ſo many things, which do not ſhew themſelves to be the will of God, are mixed with it; let me aſk you, whether God has a greater kindneſs for the brute, than the rational creation?

* Gen. xxxviii. 27.

B. That, certainly, must be a needless question.

A. If God, then, in the very frame and make of those animals we term irrational, has implanted the sense of every thing necessary to answer the end of their creation; can we imagine, he has not as great a care for his creatures endowed with reason, and made after his own image; and for ends infinitely more noble than the brute creation? When we see with what skill and contrivance birds, without being taught by any, but the God of nature, build their nests; and how artfully the spiders frame their webbs; the bees their little cells; and the beasts avoid all noxious herbs; and not to multiply instances, how all animals are endowed with sufficient sagacity, for preserving themselves and species; must we not own, that what we call instinct, is a certain and infallible guide for inferior animals? and can we doubt, whether man, the lord of the creation, has got from his superior reason, sufficient notices of whatever makes for his greatest, his eternal happiness?

If we cannot charge God with acting thus partially, must we not be obliged to own, that reason is as certain a guide for rational creatures, as instinct is for irrational? And consequently, that those men are below brutes, who wanting instinct, will not govern themselves, nor suffer others to be governed by reason? And,

Though they place the highest value on themselves for being rational, and by virtue of it religious; yet are ever contriving how to hinder the free exercise of reason in religious matters, as if reason and religion were irreconcilable; and that the method God proposes for this discovery of all other truth, was a most certain way to confound religious truth; and endlessly to multiply error. But,

Though divines in all ages have, for the most part, shewn themselves mortal enemies to the true exercise of reason; yet now, God be thanked, there are those among them, who dare do it justice.

That eminent divine, Mr. S. Nye, though writing in defence of revelation, says, "It is obvious to every

one, that natural religion intimates to us, and compriſes the whole duty, that we owe to God or men: Whatever is to be believed, or done by us, is declared and comprehended in natural religion; God has inſtructed all men every where, in the whole of their duty, by a connate light, even by the talent of reaſon common to all." Add,

The judicious Mr. Butler ſays, That nothing can be more evident, than that excluſive of revelation, mankind cannot be conſidered as a creature left by his maker to act at random———but from his make, conſtitution, or nature, he is in the ſtricteſt and proper ſenſe a law to himſelf. There are as real, and the ſame kind of indications in human nature, that we were made for ſociety, and to do good to our fellow-creatures, as that we were intended to take care of our life, health, and private good."

B. If what you, and theſe reverend authors ſay, be true; the principles, on which all religion is founded, muſt be ſo obvious, that all men, even of the meaneſt capacity, may from thence diſcern their duty both to God and man.

A. You ſhall confeſs there are ſuch principles, by my aſking you a queſtion, or two: Is not the foundation of all religion, the believing there is only one ſelf-exiſtent being, to whom all others owe their being, and their continuance in being? And is it not as certain, as there is ſuch a being, that he did not create mankind to ſupply any wants of his own; or give them rules for their conduct, but to oblige them to act for their common good? If then an action is for their good, is not that alone an infallible teſt of its being approved by God? And if it tends to their hurt, is not that as certain a mark of its being diſapproved by him? but if it tends to neither, does not that ſufficiently ſhew it to be neither approved, or diſapproved, Since it is as inconſiſtent with the goodneſs of God, to puniſh men for not doing an indifferent thing, as it is with his wiſdom, to reward them from doing it.

B. Though all rational creatures, who, to their utmoſt, imitate their great creator and benefactor, in communicating happineſs to each other, do all that God requires of them; yet it is on ſuppoſition, that they do not judge wrong in relation to their common good?

A. If men, according to the beſt of their underſtanding, act for their common good, they then govern themſelves by the ſame rule God governs them; their will is the ſame with his, and they concur in the ſame deſign with him: And ſhould they, in ſome nice and difficult caſes, miſtake in applying the rule; yet in being intirely governed by it, they have done all that God requires; who, having made men fallible, will not impute to them want of infallibility. And the beſt way not to miſtake, in applying this rule, is to conſider duly all circumſtances, and follow what upon the whole ſeems beſt. As this is the rule both of God and man, ſo it is in common to the unlearned as well as learned; for have not all alike faculties given them by God, to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; right and wrong; and to know, that, as they would not ſuffer wrong themſelves, ſo they ought not to do wrong?

B. The common people may have ſufficient abilities to know their duty to man; but can they as well know what they owe to God?

A. In what point is it, that men of the meaneſt abilities may not know their duty; whether it relates to God or man? As to the firſt, cannot they tell what ſentiments inſpire them with love and reverence for their deity? And need they much reflection to know, that the more any ſentiments do this, the more they ought to be cheriſhed? And that every notion, which tends not to raiſe in them the higheſt conceptions of the divine being, is derogatory to his perfection; and that the higheſt honor and worſhip they can render him, is ſolemnly to own him to be what he is? And that as they ought themſelves to have the higheſt ideas of love and veneration for their creator and benefactor; ſo they ſhould on all proper occaſions endeavor to excite the ſame in others? And

that as they cannot but ſee, it would be in them affronting God, to offer him a worſhip, which they believe he abhors; ſo they muſt think it the ſame in others?

As to their duty to one another, cannot they perceive, that it is fit in the nature of things, and agreeable to the mind of their creator, (who has endowed them with reaſon for this end) to introduce into this creation as much happineſs as they can; by being ready to aſſiſt, and prevent one another in all good offices? And indeed, the reciprocal duties are ſo very evident, that even children are ſenſible of doing as they would be done unto; and the mind, with the ſame eaſe, ſees the agreeableneſs or diſagreeableneſs of moral and immoral actions; as the eye diſcovers the agreeableneſs and diſagreeableneſs in outward objects. And,

The meaner people are, and the lower their ſtation, the fewer are the things their duty conſiſts in; and thoſe ſo very plain, that they cannot well miſtake, with relation either to God, or man, were they not impoſed on by artful men; who, in all ages and places, have mixed with pure religion, things tending, indeed, to their own honor, and their own good; but far from being conſiſtent with the honor of God, and the good of man; and then pretended they were neceſſary to influence the common people, who would not be ſatisfied with plain, ſimple truths: And from this ſcore have iſſued out moſt of thoſe abſurdities, which, to the ſcandal of human nature, have over-run mankind; and which, for the moſt part, were too ſubtil and metaphyſical for the common people, if left to themſelves, even to have thought of; much leſs to have raiſed commotions about them: They, it muſt be owned, peace and quiet being their intereſt, are naturally good ſubjects and good neighbors; and upon all accounts moſt uſeful members of the community; except when their prieſts, on pretence of the good of the church, work them up to tumults, mutiny, ſedition, and rebellion; becauſe their governors preſume, without their leave, to give equal protection to all their ſubjects, notwithſtanding their differenc

opinions. And if we consult ecclesiastical history, we shall find the worst of princes have been most sure of their assistance, even in carrying on the vilest designs; provided the church found their interest in so doing: And the best, of their opposition, when they designed the interest of pure religion, free from priestcraft and superstition. And the laity, certainly, cannot be too much upon their guard, when they find extraordinary favors, (such as those in a former reign,) are designed for the clergy.

I do not wholly confine this remark to the priests of any one religion; since by the influence they have on the multitude, they have at all times done sufficient mischiefs. Hence Grotius says, "That as Curtius observed of old, the multitude, ensnared by superstition, are more apt to be governed by their priests than princes; and that the kings and emperors have learnt this at their cost; insomuch that to produce examples of this kind, would in a manner be transcribing the history of all nations."

They, I think, would do no small service to mankind, who would improve this hint of Grotius, and shew how the priests in all religions, and in all times, have imposed on the credulity of the people; nor could it but be very acceptable to a clergy, who abhor all such vile methods.

B. You all along argue, that the rule of action, in order to human happiness, being every where the same; as founded on the nature of God and man, and the relation we stand in to him, and one another: True religion, in all places and times, must be ever the same; eternal, universal, and unalterable: And such as every intelligent creature, must have sufficient understanding to discover, and abilities to comply with; except we suppose a being perfectly wise, and infinitely good, requires of his creatures, things which he has not enabled them to know, or perform. And hence you conclude, that external revelation can only be a republication of this unchangeable rule of life; but divines are so sensi-

ble, for the moſt part, are of a different ſentiment; nay, highly complain of the imperfection and inſufficiency of this rule.

A. In order to ſhew the abſurdity of ſuch complaints, let me aſk you, had mankind, before any traditional religion commenced, any religion, or not?

B. It muſt be owned, that they had a religion, which, as coming from the author of all perfection, muſt, as worthy of its divine original, be wholly perfect; nor could there be a greater mark of its perfection, than that of its being univerſal, unchangeable, and indelibly implanted in human nature.

A. I will not aſk you, whether any religion, that wants thoſe marks of perfection, can come from a being of infinite perfection; but deſire to know wherein the perfection of this univerſal, and unchangeable religion conſiſts?

B. It cannot be denied, that the end for which God implanted this religion in human nature, was to make men happy here as well as hereafter; (God's will in relation to man and human happineſs, being equivalent terms) and therefore, he could not, at any time, leave them deſtitute of the moſt proper means to anſwer this end.

A. Does not the undeniable perfection of this univerſal religion, ſufficiently expoſe all your pretences to a new religion, given by God to any ſmall part of mankind in theſe laſt ages?

B. We ſay, there was need of a new religion, tho' the old was ever ſo perfect; becauſe men did not obſerve it.

A. If that was reaſon for a new religion, we might expect new religions daily: "But," as biſhop Sherlock of Bangor obſerves, "though the world was the worſe for abuſing the religion of nature, and might want to be reformed by a divine inſtructor; yet the religion of nature was not the worſe for being abuſed, but ſtill retained its firſt purity and ſimplicity;" and conſequently, its native efficacy to make us happy. But men not pay-

ing a due regard to this moſt perfect religion, but mixing with it human inventions, it might, then, be agreeable to the divine goodneſs, to ſend perſons to recal them to a ſtrict obſervation of it; which, had it been obſerved, muſt have deſtroyed all contentions, but of outvying one another in all good offices; as the corrupting it has done the contrary.

Which Hypotheſis, think you, is moſt for the honor of God, and the good of man; (thoſe certain teſts by which we are to judge of the truth of all matters relating to religion;) that all the laws of God ſhould carry with them ſuch evident marks of goodneſs and kindneſs for the whole race of mankind, as that men of the meaneſt capacities, even though they cannot read in their own native language, may know their duty? Or that their religion, and the proofs on which it depends, ſhould be originally writ in languages they underſtand not; which, by putting all traditional religions on a level, obliges them in every country, to pin their faith on men, who are but too apt to abuſe the credulity of the people to their own profit?

B. There can be no doubt, but it is for the honor of God, and the good of man, that all his laws ſhould have ſuch a ſignature impreſſed on them, as may ſhew his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs; but can you ſay, all his laws bear this character?

A. Yes, if they are all of a piece: And ſince God has no other end in creating mankind, but their good; or in giving them laws, but as they conduce to that good; and has given, and requires them to uſe their underſtanding to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; men, in doing all the good they can, whether they know any thing of the inſtitutions, which prevail in this, or that age or country, or not, fully anſwer the end of their creation; and do in the beſt manner recommend themſelves to the favor both of God and man.

Without the common people are governed by thoſe plain, obvious principles I contend for, they would always be in a ſtate of uncertainty; ſince, as biſhop Tay-

lor juſtly obſerves, and all hiſtory confirms, "There is no church that is in proſperity, but alters her doctrine every age; either by bringing in new doctrines, or by contradicting her old; which ſhews they are not ſatisfied with themſelves, nor with their own confeſſions." "Let none on the heathen," ſays an ancient church-hiſtorian, "deride us, becauſe the latter biſhops depoſe the former, and always find out ſomething which they add to the faith."

B. Is there nothing in theology, but what divines have altered?

A. Mr. Le Clerc obſerves, that "theology is ſubject to revolutions as well as empires; but though it has undergone conſiderable changes, yet the humor of divines is much the ſame."

Whatever noiſe eccleſiaſtics make about creeds, or other fundamentals, there is very often ſomething elſe at the bottom; as whoever is converſant in church hiſtory muſt know: However to give one inſtance, "When the Eaſtern and Weſtern churches in the ninth century, fell into an humor of quarrelling upon the account of juriſdiction, after ſometime of anger, in which they ſeemed to be ſearching for matter to reproach one another with; they found out this difference. The Greeks reproached the Latins, for adding to the faith about the proceſſion of the holy ghoſt; and corrupting the ancient ſymbol; and that too contrary to the decree of a general council. The Latins, on the other hand charged them for detracting from the dignity of the ſon. And this became the chief point in controverſy between them." I cannot but mention biſhop Burnet's remark, on this diſpute, "We of this church," ſays he, "tho' we abhor the cruelty of condemning the Eaſtern churches for ſuch a difference, yet do receive the creed according to the uſage of the Weſtern churches." Which is in effect, damning that creed which damns the Eaſtern churches.

And it is plain from church-hiſtory, that creeds were the ſpiritual arms, with which contending parties com-

bated each other; and that thoſe who were the majority invented ſuch unſcriptural terms, as they thought their adverſaries would moſt ſcruple, in order to the ſtripping them of their preferments; and it would have been well if they had ſtuck there, and not made uſe of more cruel methods.

None, who conſider how differently the circumſtances of human affairs, which are continually changing, affect men; but muſt ſee it is ſcarce poſſible, that the doctrines which were originally taught, or the practice originally uſed in any inſtitution, ſhould long continue the ſame; nothing being more eaſy than to vary the ſignification of words: The infinite diviſions which prevailed, even in the primitive and apoſtolical times, ſufficiently prove this without having recourſe to thoſe alterations and additions, which the clergy have ſince been continually making in chriſtianity; eſpecially in the Greek and Latin churches. But we need go no further back than the reformation: Did not the whole body of the people, laity as well as clergy, in the compaſs of twelve years, change their religion three times? And it would make no ſmall book, to ſhew how ſince that time, our clergy, though their calviniſtical articles continue the ſame, have varied, both as to doctrines and diſcipline. What a quick change have we ſeen of thoſe paſſive principles, once the characteriſtic of the church? And if we judge by the preſent diſputes now on foot, the clergy are not like to be more fixed for the future. But of all clergy-men, they, certainly, are not upon any account to be relied on; who, though by their whole conduct they ſhew their great zeal for perſecution, yet talk againſt an implicit faith, and recommend Chriſtianity as requiring no further favor, than a fair and impartial enquiry into its grounds and doctrines. This not only ſhews their great hypocriſy, but that they are more cruel than thoſe, that expreſsly forbid all examination; ſince they firſt tempt men to examine, and then puniſh them for ſo doing, if they preſume to differ from their leaders; and thoſe that forbid all examination can do no

more. And herein they act the part of satan, first tempt people, and then punish them for being tempted; so that, strictly speaking, it is not always true, that priests of all religions are the same; such hypocritical, persecuting priests are worse than all others; who, while they charge the papist, or mahometan, with a consciousness of his religion's being a cheat, because he will not permit it to be examined; not only practice the same themselves, but contend it is necessary for the support of true religion.

How easily the sense of words may be mistaken, the apostles themselves are a sufficient instance; for had they the same ideas of the words which Jesus spake, as Jesus himself had, it is impossible that after three years converse they should be ignorant of the end of his mission: And if his familiar friends, who daily conversed with him in the same language, and had every minute an opportunity of being satisfied of their doubts, could yet so grossly mistake; well may we at this distance of time, if we are to be governed by words, and not by the unalterable reason of things: And how long was it, till they understood the meaning of teach all nations; preach the gospel to every creature? And St. Peter himself needed a miracle to open his understanding, to comprehend a most evident truth. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Till this happened, he, though filled with the holy ghost, confined salvation to the name of a person; viz. the name of Christ. There is none other name under Heaven given amongst men, whereby we must be saved.†

Had there been but one language, and a book writ in that language, in indelible characters, (so that there could be none of these thirty thousand various readings, which are owned to be crept into the New Testament)

* Acts x. 34, 35. † ch. iv. 12.

and all could have acceſs to it; yet even then, conſidering how uncertain the meaning of words are, and the intereſt of deſigning men to put a wrong ſenſe on them; it muſt be morally impoſſible this religion could long continue the ſame. And,

"If," as St. Jerom ſays, "a falſe interpretation of the goſpel of Chriſt, may make it become the goſpel of men; nay, which is worſe, of devils;" how can they, who, not underſtanding the original, muſt truſt to the interpretation of others, be certain; had they not a ſufficient inward light to direct them, what doctrines are from God, what from men, and what from devils?

Is it not notorious, that popiſh prieſts, not to mention other perſecuting prieſts, have propagated ſuch deſtructive notions, that if the devil himſelf had been to contrive a religion, he could not have invented more pernicious?

Words are the arbitrary marks of the ideas of men, and the meaning of words, as well as the words themſelves, are perpetually changing; and it is as impoſſible to fix one as the other. We ſee by the innumerable verbal diſputes, which happen even among learned men, how different their ideas are; and perhaps, there are not three perſons, who, when they talk abſtractedly, have preciſely the ſame ideas, though they uſe the ſame words. No one can doubt of this, who conſiders how much the divines of the ſame church differ in explaining what they mean by divine perſon, eſſence, trinity, meſſiah, incarnation, hypoſtatical Union, original ſin, ſatisfaction, juſtification, predeſtination, grace, free-will, and all other technical terms, if I may ſo call them. Biſhop Taylor quotes Oſiander for ſaying, "There are twenty ſeveral opinions concerning juſtification, all drawn from the ſcriptures by the men only of the Auguſtine confeſſion; and there are ſixteen ſeveral opinions concerning original ſin; and as many diſtinctions of the ſacraments as there are ſects of men that diſagree about them."

That excellent critic Daillé ſays, "We have, indeed,

theſe words Pope, patriarch, maſs, oblation, ſtation, proceſſion, moral ſins, penance, confeſſion, ſatisfaction, merit, indulgence, as the ancients had, and make uſe of an infinite number of the like terms; but underſtand them in a ſenſe almoſt as far different from theirs, as our age is removed from theirs."

To give one remarkable inſtance of this nature, the primitive fathers did not believe a ſpirit to be immaterial; but only a thinner ſort of body: And this they did not only apply to the ſouls of men and angels, (who, they ſuppoſed, lay with women, and got children in abundance;) but they thought that God himſelf was corporeal. Melito, who was believed to be a prophet, and flouriſhed about 170, wrote a book about the imbodied God. And Tertullian ſays, *quis negabit deum corpus eſſe, etſi deus ſpiritus eſt?* And again, *nihil incorporale niſi quod non eſt.* And St. Hilary, even in the fourth century, affirms, there is nothing but what is corporeal. And it is very probable, that from ſome words of our ſaviour, they thought that a ſpirit was a thinner ſort of body, that could be ſeen but not felt. And from St. Paul's ſaying, In him dwelleth the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily;* and talking in ſeveral other places of a ſpiritual body, they concluded that that was the ſame with a bodily ſpirit; though our divines very well know how to diſtinguiſh between a bodily ſpirit, and a ſpiritual body.

In ſhort, there are ſcarce any words in any one language, except of ſuch things as immediately ſtrike the ſenſes, that are adequately anſwered in another, ſo as exactly to comprehend the ſame ideas; and if the ideas are only fewer, or more, what confuſion may not that occaſion? How great and how frequent muſt the miſtakes then be, in tranſlating the antiquated languages of people, who lived at a vaſt diſtance of time, as well as in countries far remote; and affected hyperbolical, parabolical, myſtical, allegorical, and typical ways of ex-

* Coloſ. ii. 9.

preſſing themſelves, as oppoſite to the uſage in other parts, as Eaſt is to Weſt? And not only this, but it will be likewiſe neceſſary to have an accurate knowledge of their manners, cuſtoms, traditions, philoſophy, religious notions, ſects, civil and eccleſiaſtical polity; of all which the common people know as little, as they do of the original languages; who having very obſcure, and incompetent conceptions of the principle words, and phraſes uſed in the verſions, their religion muſt needs be a very odd jumble of confuſed and inconſiſtent notions, were it to depend on words, and their preciſe meaning; and not on the things themſelves, and their relations, which are plain and obvious to common capacities; they would be in a manner intirely governed by ſounds; ſome of which, ſuch, as they uſed to hear ſpoken of with reſpect, they would highly reverence; while others, though of the ſame ſignification, they would as much abhor, till cuſtom had made them familiar.

*["Sure I am," ſays Mr. Locke, "that the ſignification of words in all languages, depending very much on the thoughts, notions and ideas of him that uſes them, muſt unavoidably be of great uncertainty to men of the ſame language, and country. This is ſo evident in the Greek authors, that he who peruſes their writings, will find in almoſt every one of them, a diſtinct language, though the ſame words. But when to this natural difficulty in every country, there ſhall be added different countries, and different ages, where the ſpeakers had very different notions, tempers, cuſtoms, ornaments and figures of ſpeech, &c. every one of which influenced the ſignification of their words then, though to us now, they are loſt and unknown; it would become us to be charitable one to another in our interpretations or miſunderſtandings of thoſe ancient writings.——We ought to magnify the goodneſs of God, that he has ſpared before all the world, ſuch legible characters of his works and providence; and given all mankind ſo ſufficient a light of reaſon, that they to whom this written

word never came, could not (whenever they ſet themſelves to ſearch) either doubt of the being of a God, or of the obedience due to him."]

Were men not to be governed by things, but words, the conſequence now would be much worſe than what happened on the confuſion of languages at Babel; becauſe no written religion, for want of an univerſal language could become univerſal; and people muſt, without a competent ſkill in dead languages, be obliged to take their religion on truſt, from men too, as ſubject to be deceived, as they are often ready to deceive: Nay, the univerſality of language, could it have preſerved religion uncorrupt, would have done ſo in the antediluvian world, and before the confuſion of language, which happened at Babel.

If ſkill in languages could even make the learned certain, how comes it to paſs, that what goes for orthodox in one age, ſhall be heterodox in another? What is fundamental in one church, be damnable error in another? Nay, muſt not every one, if at all verſed in church hiſtory, ſay with Mr. Chillingworth? "I ſee plain, and with my own eyes, that there are popes againſt popes, councils againſt councils; ſome fathers againſt others; the ſame fathers againſt themſelves; a conſent of fathers of one age, againſt the conſent of fathers of another age; the church of one age, againſt the church of another age?" And do not the clergy themſelves think there is ſuch uncertainty in the ſcripture-language, even in things of the greateſt moment; when they generally uſe unſcriptural terms to expreſs thoſe things? And that they cannot even here agree among themſelves, there needs no better proof than the diſputes of our divines about fundamentals; though they are, to prevent all controverſies of this nature, enacted and guarded with penal laws; and all the clergy, at every turn, obliged to ſubſcribe them in the ſame words. And,

I could name two eminent biſhops, who, if they were to give a true account of their religious tenets, it is thought, would appear to differ very widely, even

in what themſelves term fundamentals. But are not ſuch differences utterly unavoidable, as long as men found their religion on words and phraſes thus dubious; and not on the eternal reaſon, and unalterable relations of things, obvious to the meaneſt capacity?

Notwithſtanding the wide difference there is between all Chriſtian ſects, from the Papiſt down to the Quaker; I cannot help thinking, that an infinitely wiſe and good God has adapted the rules and evidences, of what he really requires from mankind, to their general capacity; and that the certainty of every command, muſt be equal to the importance of the duty. How can we ſuppoſe ſome of the moſt neceſſary duties of religion, are only to be found in volumnious books, which the greateſt part of mankind have, perhaps, never heard of; and of thoſe that have, not one in a thouſand underſtands a tittle of the languages they are writ in; or is capable of examining into thoſe records, from which the authority of theſe books are to be derived?

Is not that an admirable hypotheſis, which, though it ſuppoſes God has endowed mankind with reaſon to enable them to diſtinguiſh between religion and ſuperſtition; yet admits that almoſt all mankind are incapable of doing it, but muſt alike, in all countries, depend on the authority of men, hired to maintain the traditional religion of the places where they live; who, perhaps, will tell them, that there was a time (happy thoſe who lived in it) when religion was ſuited to the capacities of the vulgar; being preached by inſpired men in the languages they underſtood, and miracles for the conviction wro't in their ſight; but that now the ſcene was entirely changed, they had no miracles, no infallible men to have recourſe to, to ſet them right; and that their religion by diſtance of time was not only become obſcure, but that the whole of it, and the proofs on which the validity depends, are writ in languages, of which the people underſtand not a word; and that the evidence ariſing from particular types and propheſies, is now, by length of time, and diſtance of place, and change of cuſtoms,

become obſcure and difficult to the generality of people, and cannot be thoroughly diſcuſſed without a great variety of knowledge concerning the ancient Jewiſh cuſtoms, and the authority of their writings, and the exact calculation of time."* Which is in effect to ſuppoſe, that the religion of the vulgar muſt conſiſt, in taking the words of their teachers, however divided among themſelves, for the word of God; and their tranſlations, for law and goſpel; and that believing them, is having a divine faith: Though one would think, whatever depended on human traditions and tranſlations, could be but a human faith.

B. Though ſomething of this nature is unavoidable, where religion is writ in antiquated languages; yet in the main, are we not now more certain of the truth of our traditional religion, than thoſe who lived in former ages; we having the authority of every paſt age in confirmation of its truth?

A. Mr. Locke, ſpeaking concerning aſſent in matters, wherein teſtimony is made uſe of, ſays, "I think it may not be amiſs to take notice of a rule obſerved in the law of England; which is, that though the atteſted copy of a record be good proof, yet the copy of a copy never ſo well atteſted, and by never ſo credible witneſſes, will not be admitted as a proof in judicature. This is ſo generally approved as reaſonable, and ſuited to the wiſdom and caution to be uſed in our enquiry after material truths, that I never yet heard of any one that blamed it. This practice, if it be allowable in the deciſions of right and wrong, carries this obſervation along with it; viz. that any teſtimony, the further off it is from the original truth, the leſs force and proof it has. The being and exiſtence of the thing itſelf, is what I call the original truth. A credible man vouching his knowledge of it, is a good proof: But if another, equally credible, do witneſs it from his report, the teſtimony is weaker; and a third that atteſts a hear-ſay of an hear-

* Bp. of London's paſt. lett. p. 20, 21.

ſay, is yet leſs conſiderable. So that in traditional truths, each remove weakens the force of the proof. And the more hands the tradition has ſucceſſively paſſed through, the leſs ſtrength and evidence does it receive from them."——This is certain, ſays he, that "what in one age was affirmed upon ſlight grounds, can never after come to be more valid in future ages, by being often repeated?" I hope you will pardon me, if I preſume to think, that God, at all times, is ſo good and impartial, that his will, on which the happineſs of mankind at all times depends, is at all times equally knowable; and conſequently, muſt be founded on what is always alike diſcernable; the nature and reaſon of things. Can a religion, deſigned for every one, not be within the reach of every one? Or can that, which above all things it concerns ALL men to know, not be knowable by ALL?

——————*id quod*
Æque pauperibus prodeſt, locupletibus æque;
Æque neglectum pueris ſenibuſque nocebit.
Hoc opus, hoc ſtudium parvi properemus & ampli;
Si patræ volumus, ſi nobis vivere cari.

And certainly, nothing can be a greater libel on the true religion, than to ſuppoſe it does not contain ſuch internal marks, as will, even to the meaneſt capacity, diſtinguiſh it from all falſe religions; ſo as that a man, though unable to read in his mother-tongue, may, without pinning his faith on any ſet of prieſts, know what God requires of him.

I have ſaid nothing of the plainneſs, ſimplicity, and even univerſality of religion, but what is agreeable to the deſcription, which St. Paul, from the prophet Jeremiah, gives of the goſpel diſpenſation; the expreſs terms of which run thus: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be unto them a God, and they ſhall be to me a people: And they ſhall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, ſaying, know the Lord; for all ſhall know me,

from the leaſt to the greateſt.* As theſe words are too plain to need a comment, ſo I ſhall defer drawing any conſequences from them, till I have firſt endeavored to free the ſcripture from that obſcurity, in which artful men have involved it. And,

I ſhall, now, by way of recapitulation, mention what Mr. Barbeyrac, a perſon of no ſmall note in the learned world, ſays concerning the practical ſcience of morality: "None can reaſonably doubt, but that every man, who will be happy, muſt needs, in order to make himſelf ſo, regulate his conduct after ſome certain manner; and that God, as the author and parent of all human race, does preſcribe to all men without exception, the duties which tend to procure them that happineſs, which they ſo paſſionately ſeek after. Now, from hence it neceſſarily follows, that the natural principles of this ſcience are ſuch as may be eaſily diſcovered; and ſuch too, as are proportionate to the capacities of all ſorts of perſons: So that to be inſtructed in this ſcience, there will be no occaſion to mount up to Heaven; or to have from thence any extraordinary revelation for that purpoſe.——It muſt be owned, to the eternal glory of the ſupreme legiſlator of mankind, as well as to the utter confuſion of themſelves; that none can complain without injuſtice, that God has given laws, either impracticable, or invironed with ſuch obſcurity, as cannot be penetrated by one who has really his duty at heart, notwithſtanding all his pains and application. This the wiſeſt heathens have acknowledged;——(and) the ſtoics, who make morality their principle ſtudy, maintained, that their philoſophy was not above the reach of women and ſlaves: and that as the way to virtue lies open to all men without diſtinction; ſo there is no eſtate, or condition, with peculiar privileges excluſive of others, as to the faculty of knowing the principles and rules, as well of thoſe duties which are common to all; as of thoſe which belong to each particular.——The idea of a creator, boundleſs in

* Heb. viii. 10, 11. Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.

power, wiſdom and goodneſs; and the idea of ourſelves, as intelligent, reaſonable, and ſociable creatures: Theſe two ideas, I ſay, if well looked into, and compared together in their whole extent, will always furniſh us with ſteady grounds of duty, and ſure rules of conduct; notwithſtanding it may ſo fall out, that, for want of care and attention, we may in ſome common caſes, not know how to apply them; or cannot methodically demonſtrate the neceſſary connexion of ſome remote conſequences, with the firſt principles of morality.———It is certain, that the entire conformity of the chriſtian morality, with the cleareſt dictates of right reaſon, is one of the moſt convincing proofs of the divinity of the chriſtian religion; as has been acknowledged by all, who have wrote with any ſolidity on the ſubject.———And if we duly weigh, and conſider it, we ſhall find, that this is the proof, which of all others is the moſt affecting; and the beſt proportioned to the common capacities of the bulk of mankind.——[Who] When they come at length to conſider the evangelical morality, and find it intirely comfortable both to their true intereſts, and to all thoſe principles, of which every man has by nature the ſeeds in his own heart; they cannot then help concluding, that the author of it muſt neceſſarily be that very being, who has given life, and brought them into this world only to make them happy; provided they will not be wanting to themſelves, but contribute on their part, all that lies in their own power, towards the attainment of their own felicity."

I might here commend to your peruſal, what he, in ſeveral ſections, affirms of the "extreme negligence of the public miniſters of religion, in cultivating the ſcience of morality; which," as he ſays, "being by them almoſt baniſhed out of the world, took ſanctuary among the laicks, or undignified men of letters: who gave it a much better reception.———No ſooner did that admirable treatiſe of Grotius, of the right of war and peace, appear in the world, but the eccleſiaſtics, inſtead of returning thanks to the author for it, every where declar-

ed againſt him; and his book was not only put into the expurgatory index of the Roman catholic inquiſitors, but many, even proteſtant divines, labored to cry it down. And thus it fared too with Mr. Puffendorff's book of the law of nature and nations; the jeſuits of Vienna cauſed it to be prohibited; and many proteſtant divines, both of Sweden and Germany, did their beſt, to make this excellent work ſhare every where elſe the ſame fate?"

B. If theſe great men were thus dealt with, for ſetting the ſcience of morality in its due light; can you, who place religion in the practiſe of morality in obedience to the will of God, and ſuppoſe there can be no other diſtinction between morality and religion, than that the former is acting according to the reaſon of things conſidered as the will of God: can you, I ſay, hope to eſcape being pelted by ſome of the ſame profeſſion for ſuch a crime as this.

A. That, I muſt own, would be a favour I neither hope, nor wiſh for; ſince I am ſenſible, the ſhewing religion to be no arbitrary inſtitution, but founded on the nature of things, and their relations, obvious to the capacity of all that dare to uſe their reaſon; muſt provoke all eccleſiaſtics of what denomination ſoever, who expect a blind ſubmiſſion from the laity: though was it not for the authority, that the high church clergy among the reformed lay claim to, when from proteſtant principles they draw popiſh concluſions; the pretences of the popiſh prieſts for the neceſſity of an infalible guide, would appear ridiculous.

The ſubſtance of what the papiſts ſay, is, in ſhort, "that if the principles of the proteſtants, relating to private judgment, are true, the bulk of mankind cannot go beyond ſuch plain rules of religion, as carry their own evidence with them; ſince otherwiſe they would be obliged to admit things, about which they are incapable of judging? If the religion of peaſants and mechanics, men and maid-ſervants, the ignorant and illiterate, muſt depend on books written in antiquated languages, of

which they underſtand not one word; and are incapable of judging of the hiſtorical evidences of remote facts, on which the authority of thoſe books is founded; nor can know whether a religion thus founded, has been faithfully conveyed down to them. Muſt they not either be of that traditional religion, which obtains in the country where they live, (as none is without one)? or elſe muſt there not be ſome perſons appointed to judge for them in matters of religion, in whoſe determination they may ſafely acquieſce? If this be popery, there can be no mean between popery and natural religion.

"If in the earlieſt times chriſtians were ſplit into many ſects, and each ſect had their particular ſcriptures: are the common chriſtians now (when all the hiſtorical evidence is loſt but of one ſide only, and that too they underſtand not) competent judges in this matter? or to condeſcend to particulars, are they capable of judging in the controverſies between catholics and proteſtants, about the number of canonical books, oral tradition, the authority of the church, the uninterrupted ſucceſſion, and a thouſand other things; eſpecially ſuch as relate to myſteries; about which they are ſo far from being competent judges, that they are not capable of underſtanding even the terms, in which the learned chooſe to expreſs themſelves, when they endeavour to explain their inexplicable myſteries?

"Ought not the illiterate, if they had a juſt ſenſe of their own ignorance, to have been frighted upon their pretended reformation, at the very thoughts of leaving a church, to which their anceſtors had been ſo long united; (and which moſt of their adverſaries owned to be a true church, and derived their authority from her;) upon the account of opinions, they were no more capable of judging; than they were capable of judging, after they had left the church, to which of the numerous ſects they ſhould join themſelves.

"All proteſtant churches have taken the ſame methods to make people pay an abſolute ſubmiſſion to their deciſion; as the church of Rome, by excommunicating

and condemning, when they had power, to perpetual imprisonment; or otherwise punishing those who would not renounce their private opinions, when contray to their decisions; which is either condemning their own principles, or their own practices so directly opposite to their principles: but if this power of judging for people is, as the protestant clergy pretend, so necessary to preserve unity, that it must belong to every particular, and protestant church, though founded on the breach of catholic unity; how came the church itself, before the pretended reformation, to want this power so necessary to preserve itself."

B. Protestant divines, when pressed on this head, usually distinguish between a just authority, and an absolute authority.

A. Can the church of Rome, say its votaries, claim a greater authority, than the church of England does in her canons of 1600; where she declares, "all are *ipso facto* excomunicated, who shall affirm she is not an orthodox and apostolical church; not to be absolved, but by the archbishop, after having publicly renounced this their impious error." And after the same manner excommunicates "all, who affirm the articles of 1562, made to avoid diversity of opinions, *ulla ex parte superstitiosos aut erroneos existere*; all that speak against her rights and ceremonies, or condemn her ordination, and her discipline" (though she herself complains of want of Godly discipline) "by bishops, deans, archdeacons &c." all schismatics, and all congregations not establish-by law, if they assume to themselves the name of a true, and lawful church." Does not this, say the papists, shew, that though the principles of the church of England were anti-popish; yet that her practices, her laws civil as well as ecclesiastical, before the revolution, were popish; since the laws against separatists then extended to the loss, not only, of estate and liberty; but even of life itself.

From these, and such like reasons, the papists concluded, that if the people are obliged to go a step be-

yond the plain and obvious rules of natural religion, there is, in the judgment of all churches whatever, a neceſſity for them to have recourſe to others to judge for them; unleſs there are to be as many religions as judges.

B. How did our reformers anſwer theſe objections.

A. They being chiefly concerned for the authority of the ſcripture, and withal willing in their diſputes with the papiſts to ſupport private Judgement, ſaid, "that the ſcriptures themſelves, from their innate evidence, and by the illumination of the ſame holy ſpirit which indited them, ſufficiently ſhewed themſelves to be the will of God."

The Dutch confeſſion publiſhed in 1566, in the name of the Belgian churches, after having recited a catalogue of the books of ſcripture, ſay; "theſe we receive as the only ſacred and canonical books; not becauſe the church receives them as ſuch; but becauſe the holy ſpirit witneſſes to our conſciences, that they proceeded from God; and themſelves teſtify their authority."

The Gallican churches, in their confeſſion, go ſomewhat further, not only, "declaring their faith in the ſcriptures, to depend on the teſtimony of the internal perſuaſion of the ſpirit; but that thereby they know the canonical from the eccleſiaſtical, *i. e.* Apochryphal books." And,

The aſſembly of divines at Weſtminſter maintained, that "our full perſuaſion and aſſurance of the infallible truth thereof (the ſcriptures) is from the inward work of the holy ſpirit, bearing witneſs by, and with the words in our hearts."

As to foreign divines, I ſhall only mention that great reformer Calvin, who ſays, "all muſt allow, that there are in the ſcriptures manifeſt evidences of God's ſpeaking in them,—The majeſty of God in them will preſently appear to every impartial examiner, which will extort our aſſent: ſo that they act prepoſterouſly, who indeavour by any argument to beget a ſolid credit to

the ſcriptures.———The word will never meet with credit in men's minds, 'till it be ſeal'd by the internal teſtimony of the ſpirit who wrote it."

Our learned Whitaker, in his controverſey about the ſcripture againſt Bellarmine, gives this account of the doctrines of the church: "The ſum, ſays he, of our opinion is, that the ſcriptures have all their authority and credit from themſelves; that they are to be acknowledged and received not becauſe the church has appointed or commanded ſo, but becauſe they came from God; but that they came from God, cannot be certainly known by the church, but from the Holy Ghoſt?" And,

Indeed, our church ſuppoſes no man can be a good chriſtian, without being inſpired; by ſaying, works done before the grace of Chriſt, and the inſpiration of his ſpirit, are not pleaſing to God:—yea,—we doubt not, but that they have the nature of ſin. And,

As to the Diſſenters, I ſhall only quote Dr. Owen, a man not long ſince very eminent among them, who is as zealous in maintaining his opinion as any of the firſt reformers; his words are "the ſcriptures of the old and new teſtament do abundantly, and uncontrolably manifeſt themſelves to be the word of the living God; ſo that merely on the account of their own propoſal to us, in the name and majeſty of God as ſuch, without the contribution of help, or aſſiſtance from tradition, church, or any thing elſe without themſelves, we are obliged upon the penalty of eternal damnation, to receive them with that ſubjection of ſoul, which is due to the word of God. The authority of God ſhining in them, they afford unto us all the divine evidence of themſelves, which God is willing to grant us, or are any way needful for us." And leſt the Quakers ſhould take it amiſs, if while I quote other Sects, I ſhould over look them; R. Barclay ſays, "how neceſſary it is to ſeek the certainty of the ſcripture from the ſpirit, the infinite janglings, and endleſs conteſts of thoſe who ſeek their authority elſwhere, do witneſs to the truth

thereof." And then proceeds to prove thoſe infinite janglings, and endleſs conteſts.

The reformed would have argued unanſwerably, had they contented themſelves with ſaying, that there are no doctrines of a divine original contained in the goſpel-diſpenſation, but what by their innate excellency are knowable to be ſuch: as being writ in our minds, and put into our hearts by God himſelf; as is expreſsly declared by the prophet Jeremiah, and repeated and re-aſſerted by the apoſtle, and by Chriſt himſelf.* But,

Our divines, it ſeems, at laſt found out, that the reformers, and their ſucceſſors, had embraced chriſtianity on ſuch grounds, as they believed would equally ſerve any other religion, where there was a ſtrong perſuaſion; and being zealous for certain things, which do not carry any internal marks of their truth; or in other words, of being taught of God, they fell into ſtrange inconſiſtencies; ſometimes talking like Hobbiſts, of the power of the magiſtrate; ſometimes like papiſts, of the authority of the church in religious matters; and ſometimes maintaining both, and private judgment too, in the ſame diſcourſe, if not in the ſame ſection; which made their adverſaries treat them as a pack of tricking, chicaning wretches, who had no regard to truth, or conſiſtency, or any thing but their private intereſt.

The opinion, now, which ſeems to be eſpouſed by ſome, who would be thought the only true church-men, is, what the late learned Dr. Rogers maintains; who, though he agrees with the papiſts, that the people are incapable of judging for themſelves in moſt points of religion; yet, to do him juſtice, he puts the church of Rome but upon a level with all other churches of what religion ſoever, that chance to be uppermoſt; for he lays it down as a principle, "That tho' no man ought upon any authority to believe contradictions, or profeſs an aſſent to evident falſehoods, yet in queſtions, where he muſt in the event be determined by ſome au-

* Jer. xxxi. 33. Heb. x. 16. John vi. 45.

thority or other, he may reaſonably prefer the authority appointed by public wiſdom, and juſtly be required ſo to do.

" The bulk of mankind are manifeſtly unable to form a judgment, either of the arguments by which he (his antagoniſt) endeavors to ſubvert our religion, or his own; whether they adhere to us, or go to him, they muſt unavoidably rely on his, or our authority, for the truth of the ſuggeſtions on which their concluſions depend; and we preſume our word will go as far as his." This is aſſerting, that people are obliged to take their religion on truſt, and then to change it as often as there is any change in the ſtate-religion; or as often as they change their reſidence; and in all theſe changes to be governed by men, who are hired not to find out truth but to make that religion, to which their preferments are annexed, to paſs for true. And if people will not be governed, the legiſlature, or in the Doctor's phraſe, public wiſdom may juſtly require them ſo to do. Nor is the matter mended, by excepting contradictions and evident falſehoods; ſince here too, if private perſons and authority differ, public wiſdom will certainly be on the ſide of the authority it ſets up; and it is in ſuch things that the public wiſdom in moſt chriſtian countries has exerted itſelf with the utmoſt cruelty, ſo that the whole queſtion between the papiſts and the Doctor (both ſides agreeing that men cannot believe contradictions and evident falſehoods; and that there are things, which the people are incapable of knowing; or if known, cannot judge whether they are true or not;) is on whom the people in theſe points muſt pin their faith? Whether there are certain ſtanding judges appointed by Chriſt, who ſhall infallibly lead them into the truth? Or whether in every Chriſtian country the people are bound to be of the religion of thoſe fallible, not to ſay ſelf-intereſted guides, public wiſdom has athoriſed. Here it muſt be confeſſed, the Doctor is againſt the pope of Rome, but to ſet himſelf up in his ſtead; and he accordingly maintains, that thoſe who are committed to his care, are in

things of which they cannot judge, to follow his judgment; and says, "though he may mistake, and in consequence of it mislead them, yet they will have this defence before Christ, that they have sought his will in the methods which he has directed; and where they wanted a guide, preferred one appointed to that office according to his institution." But why may not a parish-priest appointed by public wisdom in North-Britain, France, or any other country, say the same to people incapable of judging in these points? Is not this supposing, that the christian religion, in many points, is so framed, that in every parish the people must follow the judgment of their parish-priest; because they are to seek (and what more can be required of them) Christ's will in the manner the parish-priest tells them Christ directs? And is not this popery, even worse than Roman popery, as it is setting up a pope in every parish; and obliging the people, as often as any of them change their parish, or he his parish, or his mind, to change their religion too, in every thing that is not self-evident, or a manifest contradiction, in compliance with their present parish pope?

I cannot but remark, how good wits, though they lived in very distant times, and seem of very different religions, have luckily hit on the same thought; I mean Vergerius, who, in Luther's days, was nuncio to the pope; and Dr. Rogers, late chaplain to a protestant king, at the head of the protestant interest. The former said to Luther, If you could have had any thing innovated in the faith, in which you were bred up for thirty-five years, for your conscience and salvation sake, it was sufficient to have kept it to yourself." The latter asserts, "That in the christian religion, the apostle's rule is, hast thou faith, have it to thyself;" And yet it is plain, the apostle was persecuted by the Rogerians of those days, for not keeping his faith to himself.

B. Whatever Vergerius might deserve from popish public wisdom, for misapplying this text, to put a stop to the reformation; a protestant divine could deserve nothing but contempt from protestant public or private

wiſdom, for ſo notoriouſly perverting its meaning, and openly bantering our firſt reformers; and not only condemning them, for not keeping their religion to themſelves, but aſſerting, that all, who (without a ſpecial commiſſion) from the beginning of the world to this day, have "labored by public preaching, or writing, to withdraw the ſubmiſſion of men to the eſtabliſhed religion, whether pagan, mahometan, or popiſh, and gather congregations in oppoſition to it, contrary to the command of the magiſtrate;" have been guilty of the damnable ſin of diſobedience and ſedition. So that if popery had been eſtabliſhed by law in king James's reign, all proteſtants muſt have kept their religion in their own breaſts; ſince publicly profeſſing a religion cannot but be unlawful, where there is no coming at it, but by unlawful means. The papiſts, ſure, need no other arguments, to ſhew the unlawfulneſs of the reformation in moſt places, than what this reverend divine has furniſhed them with. And though he declares himſelf an enemy to all perſecution, and owns, "that if there be no public worſhip, there muſt be all the appearance that can be of abſolute irreligion; yet the chief deſign of his vindication of the civil eſtabliſhment is to prove, that all magiſtrates, of what religion ſoever, have a right to oblige all, but thoſe of their own communion, to keep their religion to themſelves." Which is declaring for perſecution as well as irreligion; ſince all men believe it is their duty publicly to worſhip God, though contrary to all human commands; and he himſelf dares not ſay he would obey ſuch commands.

A. And his diſtinction between men's acting with, or without a ſpecial commiſſion, is impertinent in relation to a magiſtrate, who owns no ſuch commiſſion; and the whole is inconſiſtent with that authority, which, in another place, he gives to the church or clergy, of preſcribing what doctrines ſhall be taught, and what not: But if the magiſtrate, for the ſake of the ſtate, can forbid the public profeſſion of all religions but one; why not that one? ſince I believe, there is ſcarce any in-

ſtance where the profeſſion of but one has been permitted; but that religion ſoon degenerated into prieſtcraft, to the entire deſtruction of the civil liberties of men; and the magiſtrate, as well as his ſubjects, has been forced to ſubmit to the arbitrary, and vile impoſitions of his own prieſts.

In ſhort, this noble ſcheme, if there is any conſiſtency in it, is, that in all matters of religion, where people are capable of judging; they muſt not, if the magiſtrate thinks fit, openly profeſs their religion; and in all other things, which depend on book-learning, they are to be governed by their reſpective pariſh-popes. And if ſuch a ſcheme as this, could recommend the perſon that publiſhed it, to a much larger pariſh-popedom than he had before; it is high time for the laity to conſider, whether all the blood and treaſure which have been ſpent to keep out but one pope, has not been ſpent in vain; if, inſtead of that one, we are now to have thouſands?

I do not find, that the apoſtles taught there was any thing in religion, of which people were incapable of judging; for though men could not well be lower in point of underſtanding, than thoſe to whom the goſpel was firſt preached; yet even theſe are commanded to judge for themſelves; to prove all things; to take heed to what they hear; to try the ſpirits to avoid falſe prophets, ſeducers, and blind guides, And if this was their duty in the apoſtolic times, it was, certainly, ſo in all after-ages; and if there are now any ſuch things, by what authority ſoever introduced, as make the apoſtolical rule impracticable; I ſhall, with ſubmiſſion to Dr Rogers, venture to affirm, they are no part of the chriſtian religion; and thoſe who teach them are falſe prophets, ſeducers and deceivers; and as ſuch, are to be ſhuned by all chriſtians.

St. Chryſoſtom thinks religion ſo very plain, that he ſays, "Were it not for our ſloth, we had no need of teachers." And we do not find that even the fathers thought the people, as not being able to judge for them-

ſelves, were to believe in their pariſh-prieſts. Lactantius, for inſtance, ſays, "That in thoſe things, eſpecially, which concern our life eternal, it becomes every man to ſearch, and examine the truth of them by his own ſenſe and judgment, rather than to expoſe himſelf by a fooliſh credulity to the hazard of being ſeduced into the errors of other men." And St. Baſil tells us, "It is the duty of auditors not to believe implicitly, but to examine the words of thoſe that inſtruct them." And all our divines, I mean ſuch as are, what they pretend, proteſtants; ſhew they have not ſo mean an opinion of the underſtanding of the people, by frequently exhorting them to judge for themſelves; and telling them, "They have no reaſon to expect Heaven, if they will not be at the pains of examining what would bring them thither; and that the luckineſs of the accident, ſhould they ſtumble on truth, would not atone for the neglect of this grand duty.

A judicious divine of our church, Clagget, very juſtly obſerves, "That they, who have a good cauſe, need no diſingenious arts; they will not fright men from conſidering what their adverſaries ſay, by denouncing damnation againſt them; nor forbid them to read their books, but rather encourage them ſo to do; that they may ſee the difference between truth and falſehood, between reaſon and ſophiſtry, with their own eyes.——And whenſoever Guides of a party do otherwiſe, they give juſt cauſe to thoſe that follow them to examine their doctrines ſo much the more carefully, by how much they are unwilling to have them examined. It is a bad ſign, when men are loth to have their opinions ſeen in the day, but love darkneſs rather than light.

The fault of the people, even from the beginning, has been, as the memorable Mr. Hales obſerves, that "They, through ſloth and blind obedience, examined not the things they were taught; but like beaſts of burden, patiently couched down, and indifferently underwent whatever their ſuperiors laid upon them.

Happy would the laity have been, if they had given

no juſt occaſion for this infamous character; though if they had followed the example of their clergy in this one thing, of being as true to their common intereſt, as theſe have always been to the ſeparate intereſt of their own order; that alone would have preſerved religion in its native ſimplicity, as being a thing wholly deſigned for their general good; and then would ſeem to be out of the power of the prieſts to corrupt it.

B. Is not this ſuppoſing, moſt, if not all, the corruptions of religion, which have prevailed in any church, are owing to their impoſitions, and the blind deference of the laity?

A. If you think I ſpeak this without juſt grounds, examine into the preſent, and paſt ſtate of Chriſtendom; and ſee whether all thoſe groſs depravations, and perverſions of religion, which have prevailed in moſt places, were not contrived to advance the ſeparate intereſts of the eccleſiaſtics; and religion been corrupted, in an exact proportion to the number, riches, influence, and power of theſe reverend gentlemen? Now theſe corruptions being calculated for their intereſt, could a majority without a miracle (as biſhop Burnet ſays, in relation to our reformation) agree in correcting thoſe abuſes? And I may add, that in all countries, where people have not had the liberty to judge for themſelves in religious matters, no other liberty has been preſerved; but men have been ſlaves both in body and mind: Such power has the united force of eccleſiaſtics!

A judicious author ſays, "it was not unreaſonable in the begining of the reign of Edward VI. and queen Elizabeth to think the lords and commons better judges of religion than the biſhops and convocation. The whole body can have no ſiniſter intereſt to blind them; but the whole clergy, which is but a part of the whole body, may; and therefore the whole body is to judge of this. The meaneſt man is as much intereſted, and concerned in the truth of religion, as the greateſt prieſt; for though his knowledge thereof be not in all reſpects equally eaſy, yet in ſome reſpects it may be eaſier. For want of

learning does not ſo much hinder the light of the layman, as wordly advantage and faction ſometimes does the prieſt; and the examples of theſe are infinite. Corruption in the church before our ſaviour, and in our ſaviour's days, and ever ſince; has often begun amongſt the greateſt prieſts, rabbies, and biſhops, than among the meaneſt laity."

What St. Paul ſays to the chriſtians of Corinth, in relation to falſe apoſtles, has been verified in all ages: ye ſuffer fools gladly, ſeing yourſelves are wiſe.—Ye ſuffer if a man bring you into bondage; if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himſelf, if a man ſmite you on the face.* And, indeed, the laicks have ſo ſeldom thought of aſſerting their natural rights in religious matters, that they have generally ſacrificed to the malice of the prieſts, all, who have endeavoured to maintain thoſe rights; and if the people throw off one ſet of eccleſiaſtical tyrants, it was only to be ſlaves to another; and were ever ready to join any one, that endeavoured to ſet them free from eccleſiaſtical tyranny; under which the whole chriſtian world would have groaned, had not ſo many accidents concurred at the reformation.

We pray againſt being led into temptation; but do we not lead the clergy into the almoſt irreſiſtable temptation, to impoſe what they pleaſe on the people? What may not men, who in a manner, ingroſs the teaching of the young, and inſtructing of the old; and have great powers, and vaſt revenues, and thoſe too daily encreaſing, bring about by their joint endeavours; and that much more eaſily, than when they had nothing to depend on but the alms of the people? What is it, that ſuch a confederacy, ſo modelled, may not effect; eſpecially where they are careſſed by all praties? nay, even by that, which is by too many of them deſpiſed and hated for their unpardonable crime of being againſt perſecution? Are the clergy leſs ſelfiſh, and deſigning than they were in thoſe times ſome call the pureſt? or, are the laity grown

* 2 Cor. xi. 19, 22.

wiſer, and by the experience of ſo many ages, more upon their guard?

People abroad were ſurpriſed to find a nation, in former times ſo miſerably oppreſſed by the eccleſiaſtics, capable, even under a whig adminiſtration, of repealing that ſtatute of mortmain, which their predeceſſors thought abſolutely neceſſary to prevent an all devouring corporation from ſwallowing every thing; and at the ſame time to ſee the firſt fruits and tenths, granted at the reformation to the crown, as a juſt acknowledgment of the regal ſupremacy, to be given for ever to this inſatiable corporation; and at a time too, when their revenues were daily encreaſing. Theſe ſurpriſing favours made foreigners very inquiſitive to know, how the conduct of the clergy had merited more ſince the revolution, than it did at the reſtoration; or any other time ſince the reformation? But begging pardon for this neceſſary digreſſion, I ſhall now ſhew, from the confeſſion of that great divine and philoſopher, Dr. H. More, how little reaſon the laity, though of the meaneſt capacity, have to depend upon the authority of church-men: his words are, "there is ſcarce any church in chriſtendom at this day, which does not obtrude not only plain falſhoods, but ſuch falſhoods as will appear to any free ſpirit, pure contradictions and impoſſibilities; and that with the ſame gravity, authority, and importunity, as they do the holy oracles of God." If this be true, what a miſerable condition muſt people be in, if they are to depend on this gravity, authority and importunity of their reſpective prieſts, who, it is poſſible, may not believe the creeds and articles they ſubſcribe, and yet be againſt making the leaſt change; for fear of putting the people upon examining into other things, wherein the intereſt of the clergy is more nearly concerned; which may occaſion them to aſſume to themſelves the unpardonable crime of ſeeing with their own eyes, and judging with their own underſtandings. That convocation very well knew what they did, which in 1689 with ſo much indignation rejected thoſe propoſals, that ſome of our moſt eminent divines

were by the crown authoriſed to offer them, for making alterations in the liturgy; particularly in leaving the clergy at liberty with relation to the Athenaſian creed.

In ſhort, whoever in the leaſt reflects, muſt needs ſee, that in moſt churches many of their fundamental articles are defined to impoſe on the credulous laity; and that the prieſts themſelves cannot believe them. Can the pope of Rome any more believe himſelf infalible, than the Tartarian pope, or lama, believes himſelf immortal? or than proteſtant prieſts (whoſe churches are founded on private judgment) can believe they have a right to make creeds and articles for the people? Can even the Romiſh prieſts any more believe they can pardon ſins, than the Bonzes believe the money they borrow in this world, ſhall be repaid to their creditors in the next? Or can the popiſh prieſts, though they made the laity for many ages renounce their ſenſes, have different ideas of the bread and wine, after they have mumbled over certain words, than they had before? or can the Lutheran prieſts believe they have the power of conſubſtantiation? or the calviniſtical prieſts think, they can make the body and blood of chriſt to be not figuratively, or not indeed; but verily, and indeed, taken by the faithful? or can any of thoſe prieſts believe they give the holy ghoſt? or that they have an idelible character? or that there can be *imperium in imperio*? or can the popiſh prieſts any more believe their legendary traditions, than the pagan prieſts did their oracles? or ſome other prieſts the doctrine of paſſive obedience? or the calviniſtical articles they ſo ſolemnly ſubſcribe? or that awes on the one hand, and bribes on the other, is the way to promote the proteſtant principle, of every man's being obliged to judge for himſelf in all religious matters, without prejudice and partiality? or an hundred other things, which, with the ſame gravity, authority, and importunity, they impoſe on the people?

If men, notwithſtanding they pretend to be inwardly moved by the holy-ghoſt, go into orders as they take to a trade, to make the beſt of its myſteries (and all trades

their myſteries); and are bound for the ſake of their maintenance, to maintain thoſe doctrines which maintain them; and leſt they ſhould not do ſo, are ſhackled with ſubſcriptions upon ſubſcriptions: Can theſe men, I ſay, under all the prejudices this world affords, be proper perſons for the laity to depend on in the choice of their religion? Or, are they, who are not permitted to chooſe their own religion, fit to chooſe religion for others? In this caſe, would not the blind lead the blind into the ditch of popery, &c. And I think, I may venture to ſay, that men may as ſafely truſt the choice of their religion to the chance of a dye, as to the chance of education; conſidering who, for ſo many ages have had the cooking up of religion. And every one muſt ſee, that thoſe things, which are brought into religion, contrary to the end of it, as they are inconſiſtent with the intereſt of the people, ſo they favor more of art and learning, than to belong to ſimple men; eſpecially in thoſe times they were introduced. And as Adam ſaid to God, The woman, whom thou gaveſt to be with me, ſhe gave me of the tree, and I did eat; ſo might the people ſay of their prieſts, did they believe them *jure divino*; "The prieſts thou gaveſt us, deceived us, and we have been deceived."

B. This is too ſevere.

A. You know, that thoſe few good men among the eccleſiaſtics, have ſaid as much of their own body; and therefore, I ſhall only mention what Picus Mirandula had the courage to ſay to Leo the tenth, and the Lateran council: He after having complained, that all orders of men were debauched by the clergy, ſays, *Nec ſane mirum, quando malum omne prodire de templo Johannes Chryſoſtomus cenſet; & hieronomus ſcribit. Je inveniſſe neminem qui ſeduxerit populos, præterquam ſacerdotes.* Though it was not always they could corrupt them; for the celebrated St. Ambroſe ſays, *Plerumq; clerus erravit, ſacerdotis mutavit ſententia, & vites cum ſeculi iſtius terreno rege ſenſerunt, populus fidem propriam reſervavit.*

This can be no reflections on the eccleſiaſtics among us, who abhor all theſe principles, by which their predeceſſors enſlaved men both body and ſoul; and who maintain no opinions, however advantageous to the order, that are againſt the public good; and are ſo far from promoting perſecution, that by their example as well as writings, they have highly contributed to that humanity, charity, and benevolence, which, to the great grief of others, is daily increaſing among men of the moſt different perſuaſions. Thus, where the clergy are good, the people of courſe will be ſo; and therefore, ſuch clergymen (of which, perhaps, we now have more, than have ever been in the church ſince Conſtantine's time;) cannot be too much eſteemed, for conquering the ſtrong prejudice of education, and the ſtronger of intereſt. And they, certainly, ought to be as much valued by the laity for ſo unuſual a generoſity, in defending the common rights of mankind; as they are hated by their brethren, for giving up thoſe claims, by which they have at all times commanded the purſes, as well as the conſciences of the people; when too, they could not but be ſenſible, what they were to expect from their reſtleſs enemies; whether they ſhould be permitted to exert themſelves.

And here I cannot omit ſaying, that, if he, who beſt defends the church, beſt deſerves to rule it; juſtice has eminently appeared in the promotion of that perſon, now happily preſiding over it; who ſo early put a ſtop to the boaſted triumphs of the ableſt adverſary our church ever had; and has ſince protected it againſt its worſt, its domeſtic enemies, treacherouſly undermining the conſtitution; who, as he treats all with that condeſcending goodneſs inſeparable from true greatneſs, ſo he encourages piety and virtue, without diſtinction of parties: And though he has with equal prudence expoſed both popiſh and proteſtant perſecution; yet both the Sorbonne and Geneva, however differing in moſt other things, agree in owning ſo illuſtrious a merit. And I may challenge all church-hiſtory to ſhew three ſuch bi-

ſhops, as to the honor of the revolution, have, ſince that bleſſed time, ſucceeded one another at Lambeth.

I muſt beg your patience for adding, on this inexhauſtible ſubject, one reaſon more, for mens being governed by things rather than words: It has been a general practice with the introducers of civil tyranny, though they changed the form of Government, to retain the old names; the better to hinder the people from being ſenſible of the change: And may not this have happened in church-matters? And may not eccleſiaſtical tyranny be brought in, and ſupported by the ſame means? Has not this very term church, had a different meaning put on it, from what it has in the original? And is not the Greek word ſometimes tranſlated aſſembly, ſometimes church; the better to confound the rights of the church, or people, as that word in ſcripture always ſignifies? In one of our articles, the church is defined to be a congregation of the faithful, &c. yet is it not every where elſe taken for the clergy? When it is ſaid in the very next article, "The church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in matters of faith;" is it meant of the congregation of the faithful? And is not a conſtant practice among ſome men, to talk of the power and authority of the church, when they only mean their own; in hopes to make that, which otherwiſe people might ſtart at, go down under its ſacred name?

Are the people now taught to conceive the ſame thing by the word biſhop, as it means in the original; where biſhop and preſbyter are ſynonimous terms? Is it not to prevent their ſeeing it, that we tranſlate the Greek word ſometimes by overſeer, ſometimes by biſhop? For the firſt three or four centuries, every congregation had its own biſhop, who was conſtantly obliged to reſide, and to officiate in the pariſh-church: And as among the Jews, the ruler of one ſynnagogue had nothing to do in any other; ſo among the primitive chriſtians (whoſe diſcipline was accommodated to that of the Jews,) it would have been thought highly anti-chriſtian, and in-

vading the rights of his brethren, for one biſhop to have more than one altar, or communion-table. But things continually changing, a pariſh biſhop, maintained by the alms of his congregation, commenced a biſhop, not only of many pariſhes, but of a whole province; nay, of many provinces, with the titles, pomp. and grandeur of princes; and at laſt, to an univerſal biſhop, pope, or vice-god.

The only church that has now any pretence to primitive epiſcopacy, is that of North-Britain; where ſince the bleſſed revolution, a parity of pariſh-biſhops has been eſtabliſhed: If you want fully to underſtand the conſtitution of the primitive church, in this, and all other points, you need only read the inquiry into the conſtitution, diſcipline, unity and worſhip of the primitive church, &c. written by the greateſt critic, divine, and lawyer, of this, or, perhaps, any other age.

*[Is not deacon a new office under an old name, and are not overſeers of the poor the true ſcripture deacons?] And what other reaſon can be aſſigned, why DIACONOS, Rom. xvi. 1. is not rendered diaconeſs, as well as elſewhere deacon, but ſervant of the church; except it be to hinder the people from perceiving, that there was in the days of the apoſtles, an order of women, who had ſomething more to do in the church than to ſweep it; and who, even at the council of Nice (Can. 19.) are reckoned among the clergy? Did hereſy, or ſchiſm, (thoſe religious ſcare-crows, as the memorable Mr. Hales calls them;) ſignify any ſuch thing in the days of the apoſtles, as afterwards, to the infinite prejudice of chriſtendom, they were made to mean? Why do we give the name of prieſt to the Jewiſh ſacrificer, as well as to the chriſtian elder (things ſo widely different); but to make people believe the latter have a divine right to every thing, which, under the theocracy, belonged to the former? And as in the New Teſtament the preachers of the goſpel are never termed IEREIS, or prieſts; ſo Scaliger remarks that the word ſo applied, is not to be met with till after Juſtin's time.

Has the word clergy the ſame meaning now, as in the New Teſtament, where it is taken in oppoſition to thoſe we now call ſo? And did not eccleſiaſtical tyranny, and the ingroſſing that name by the miniſters of the church, commence together?

Nor is it difficult to ſee the reaſon, why the word BAPTIZO was not tranſlated but naturalized; ſince the people would then have perceived, that not ſprinkling, but dipping, or immerſing, was meant by it; but ſhould any now (ſo much cuſtom has prevailed) ſay John the dipper, inſtead of John the baptiſt, people would think it profane.

If words have been thus artfully managed in relation to things; have not people much more reaſon to ſuſpect the ſame management in relation to ſpeculative points, where words allow a greater latitude? If zeal had had the ſame meaning in after-times as in the ſcripture, it had never occaſioned ſo much miſchief. And what miſchief have not thoſe two miſinterpreted words, zeal and church, by the artful management of deſigning men, occaſioned? Nay, is not religion made to ſignify ſomething very different from what it does in ſcripture? How few, when they hear that word, think of the deſcription given by St. James, of pure and undefiled religion?* What abſurdities have not people brought into religion, by fixing a ſenſe on the word myſtery unknown to the ſcripture? Nay, have not ſome people, if the univerſity of Oxford is a good judge, advanced falſe, impious, and heretical doctrines concerning the Godhead, in declaring the three perſons are three diſtinct, infinite minds, or ſpirits; tho' now revived by Dr. W———d, with the applauſe of thoſe who before condemned it? And did not they, who eſpouſed thoſe doctrines, repreſent their adverſaries as abſurd Sabellians; in either making the three perſons in the divine being, to be analagous to three poſtures in a human being, (for this was the utmoſt Dr. South's divinity could reach to); or with Dr. Wallis,

* Jam. i. 27.

three ſomewhats, of which they themſelves had no idea? Good God! what pains men take to deface the idea, which the light of nature as well as the ſcripture gives of God; and which every one conceives, when he hears him mentioned on either a natural, political, or religious account!

In ſhort, was it not running too far from our preſent purpoſe, it would not be very difficult to ſhew, that there are very few terms in ſcripture, which have things of moment depending on them, but what have loſt their original meaning to become orthodox.

If they, who have the tranſlating any old book capable of vaſtly different ſenſes, make it ſpeak what is moſt for their intereſt; muſt not others be very good men indeed, who will find fault with a tranſlation in ſuch points as make for their common advantage; or be at the pains in ſuch caſe, to diſcover any favorable additions, ſubſtractions, or alterations that might have been made in the ſcriptures or other ancient writings? eſpecially if it be true what Mr. Wiſton complains of, that "It is frequently in the mouths of the writers for the church, that ſome things are to be concealed for fear they gratify atheiſts and deiſts;" and ſays, "Certainly, nothing prejudices them more than ſuch proceedure and expreſſions, while they thereby perceive remains of pious frauds every where, and ſuſpect it has been ſo from the beginning. They ſee they are not to be let plainly into the truth of facts, but to be managed with cunning, and worldly prudence, for fear of being diſguſted at Chriſtianity."

Muſt not the people be at a loſs, when they ſee how differently the texts in the moſt momentous parts are interpreted? Dr. S. Clark has reckoned up more than 1250 texts relating to the doctrine of the trinity; and how few of them are interpreted alike by the contending parties? It is chiefly owing to theſe different interpretations, that, where force has not interpoſed, it has from age to age been diſputed, whether we have but one, or more than one object of ſupreme worſhip. A point,

which, was reaſon allowed to be a competent judge, would not meet with the leaſt difficulty; and had we a Bible tranſlated by unitarians, many texts would be very differently tranſlated from what they are at preſent; and ſome left out as forged. When ſo judicious a divine and critic as the now biſhop of A—— ſays, "We ſhould have more of the true text by being leſs tenacious of the printed one;" muſt not that give great uneaſineſs to thoſe who have nothing to truſt to but the printed text? And will this uneaſineſs be abated by his affirming that "it may with great truth be ſaid of Chillingworth (the greateſt champion the proteſtant cauſe ever had) that he was abler at pulling down than building up; towards which little can be expected from one, who is by his own arguments puſhed ſo hard in the defence he would make of proteſtaniſm, that he has nothing left but to cry out, the bible, I ſay, the bible is the religion of proteſtants." Nay, muſt not that uneaſineſs be very much increas'd by divines, perpetually endeavoring to mend by their criticiſms ſeveral capital places in the ſacred writers; nay, who pretend daily to make new and momentous diſcoveries? How muſt their hearers be edified, when they tell them it is thus or thus, in ſuch an ancient manuſcript, father, or aſſembly of fathers; or cry, it is rendered more agreeable to the mind of the holy ghoſt in the ſeptuagint, vulgar Latin, Syriack, Chaldaick, Ethiopic, Coptic, Gothick, or ſome other verſion?

If no court of judicature, though in a thing of ſmall moment, will admit of a copy, though taken from the original, without oath made by a diſintereſted perſon of his having compared it; becauſe the leaſt miſtake, a various pointing, a parentheſis, a letter miſplaced, may alter the ſenſe; how can we abſolutely depend in things of the greateſt moment on voluminous writings, which have been ſo often tranſcribed by men, who never ſaw the original; (as none, even of the moſt early writers pretend they did): And men too, who even in the earlieſt times, if we may judge by the number of forged

paſſages, and even forged books, would ſcruple no pious frauds, And though there have been innumerable copies of the New Teſtament loſt, which, no doubt, had their different readings, yet as it ſtands at preſent, we are told, there are no leſs than thirty thouſand various readings.

B. Though there are ſo many various readings, yet does not that great critic, Dr. Bentley, in his propoſal for printing by ſubſcription, a new edition of the New Teſtament, aſſure the world, "That out of a labyrinth of thirty thouſand various readings, which croud the pages of our preſent beſt editions, all put upon an equal credit to the offence of many good perſons, that his clue, as he calls it, ſo leads and extricates us, that there will be ſcarce two hundred out of ſo many thouſands, that can deſerve the leaſt conſideration.

A. Has this critic loſt his clue, and ſo forced to drop the noble deſign of aſcertaining the text of the New Teſtament, and let the thirty thouſand various readings remain on an equal foot to the offence of many good perſons? who will now as much deſpair of ſeeing it done, as they do of Mr. Whiſton's reſtoring the true text of the Old Teſtament; which, he ſays, "Has been greatly corrupted both in the Hebrew and Septuagint by the Jews, to make the reaſonings of the apoſtles from the Old Teſtament inconcluſive and ridiculous.

Dr. Bentley, certainly, ought to go on with his propoſal; becauſe the world will hardly take the Doctor's word, that in a book, where moſt things are owned to be of the greateſt moment, there ſhould be ſo many various readings of no moment; though one or two may be of that conſequence, as to deſtroy the deſign of the whole book. In a preſcription where there are ever ſo many wholeſome drugs, if a poiſonous one happens to be mixed, it may turn the whole into rank poiſon. If the doctrine of the trinity is of the greateſt moment, was not the church highly concerned to prevent various readings in that important point, as well as ſome forged texts?

Had the ſcripture been better guarded in many other matters of conſequence, there could not have been ſo many texts ſeemingly claſhing with one another; that there are ſuch, is denied by none: Dr. Scott lays it down as certain, that "that opinion is falſe, or of little moment, that has but one, or two texts to countenance it; and that very dubious, which has none but obſcure texts to rely on; but when there are more, and much plainer texts for it than againſt it, it muſt be falſe."

And another judicious divine, Burnet, ſays that "our faith is not to be built on ſingle texts, becauſe they may have been corrupted; though we have no manuſcript to point out to us, that the other manuſcripts have been ſo corrupted in theſe paſſages." But,

If we cannot depend on ſingle texts; and where there are ſeveral, the plaineſt are to carry it; the difficulty will be to know which are the plaineſt; ſince the different ſects of chriſtians have ever pretended, that the plaineſt texts are on their ſide; and wondered how their adverſaries could miſtake their meaning.

The plain texts from St. Auſtin's Days, at leaſt in the Weſt were all in favour of predeſtination; and upon thoſe plain texts the articles of our moſt excellent church, and all other Proteſtant Churches are founded: it is true in Queen Elizabeth's reign, there were ſome few among the inferior clergy for free-will; but then thoſe incorrigible free-will men, as they were called, were by the direction of the Biſhops, ſent to priſon; there to live on hard labour, till they repented of their errors. But ſince the court in Charles I's reign, helped to open the eyes of our divines, they, no longer blinded by their articles, clearly ſee, that all thoſe plain texts (and what a number are muſtered up on both ſides) are all for free-will; againſt which, now, there are none but are looked on as incorrigible.

B. Though thoſe books, which contain the traditional religions of other nations, have, notwithſtanding all the care taken to prevent it, been mixed with fables and monſtrous tales; yet we ſay that the ſcripture, eſpecial-

the new teſtament, though there are ever ſo many various readings muſt needs be free from all errors of conſequence; becauſe that being deſigned by God for a plain and unalterable rule, for the actions of mankind, cannot but be ſo guarded by providence, as to hinder any miſtakes of moment.

A. Your reaſoning I grant, holds good in relation to the law of nature, which equally obliges, at all times and places, the whole race of mankind; but then that depends not on the knowledge of any language dead or living; or on the ſkill, or honeſty of tranſcribers, or tranſlators; but on that, which as it is apparent to the whole world, ſo it is not in the power of mortals to alter; viz. the unchangeable relation of things, and the duties reſulting from thence.

"The tranſcribers of books (as that learned and judicious critick Daillé obſerves) "have been guilty of innumerable miſtakes;" and that St. Jerom (the moſt learned of the fathers) complains, "they wrote not what they found, but what they underſtood:" and he gives Inſtances of attempts made on the New Teſtament by the orthodox themſelves; particularly St. Epiphanius, for ſaying. "that in the true, and moſt correct copies of St. Luke, it was writ, that Jeſus Chriſt wept;" and that this paſſage had been alledged by St. Irenæus, but as the catholicks had blotted out the word, fearing that the hereticks might abuſe it. The ſame St. Jerom ſays, the laſt twelve verſes in the laſt chapter of Mark were left out in moſt Greek Bibles; *Omnibus Græciæ Libris pene hoc capitulum non habentibus.* Grotius imputes this omiſſion to the tranſcribers: but Maldonat will not allow of Grotius's Reaſon, becauſe he ſays, Luke and John differ more with Mathew than Mark does. *Major enim inter illos & Matthæum, quam inter Matthæum & Marcum apparet repugnantia.*

Hilary, ſpeaking of Chriſt's bloody ſweat, and the angel ſent to comfort him ſays, *Nec ſane ignorandum nobis eſt, in Græcis & Latinis codicibus compluribus, de adveniente Angelo, vel de ſudore ſanguineo nihil ſcriptum reperiri.* This St. Jerom ſeems to confirm.

For my part, I think, that at leaſt, till we are extricated by Dr. Bentley's clue, the beſt way not to be miſtaken, is to admit all for divine ſcripture, that tends to the honor of God, and the good of man; and nothing which does not. This clue, I think, will extricate the learned as well as unlearned out of many otherwiſe inſuperable difficulties; and make the laws of God, which way ſoever revealed, entirely to agree; and deſtroy that abſurd notion of God's acting arbitrarily, and commanding for commanding-ſake: and does not St. Paul ſuppoſe no ſcripture to be divinely inſpired, but what is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs* ? and if this be the teſt, ought we to admit any thing to be writ by inſpiration, though it occurs ever ſo often in ſcripture, till we are certain it will bear the teſt; and, indeed, was it otherwiſe, we ſhould be in a ſad condition, ſince there is ſcarce any opinion, though ever ſo abſurd, or ridiculous, but has its vouchers, who quote texts on texts, for its ſupport. Good Lord! what a load have the different parties laid on it, by their not obſerving this Rule? But,

Could we ſuppoſe any difference between natural and traditional Religion; to prefer the latter, would be acting irrationally; as that prophet did, who went contrary to what God had commanded him by an immediate revelation: becauſe a known prophet aſſured him, he had a different revelation for him. A crime ſo henious in the eyes of the Lord that he deſtroyed this prophet after a moſt ſignal manner; though he had to plead for himſelf, that the prophet, who ſpoke to him in the name of the Lord, could have no intereſt in deceiveing him; and that their was nothing in the command, but might as well come from the Lord, as what himſelf had received. And it is worth obſerving, that the lying prophet was ſo far from being puniſhed, that the Lord continued to him the gift of prophecy;

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

nay, pronounced by his mouth the doom of the prophet, he ſo fatally deceived.

B. why is this more worth obſerving than the caſe of Abimelech, who, upon both Abraham's and Sarah's lying to him, took Sarah as the Lord himſelf owns, in the integrity of his heart; and though he ſent her back untouched, and gave conſiderable preſents to both wife and huſband; yet neither he, nor his, were to be pardoned, till Abraham (the offending perſon) being a prophet, was to pray for him: ſo Abraham prayed unto God, and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and maid-ſervants; and they bare children. And yet this holy prophet was ſoon after guilty of a very barbarous action, in ſending out Hagar, whom Sarah had given him to wife, and his ſon Iſhmael, to periſh in the wilderneſs; for no other reaſon, but becauſe Sarah had ſeen the ſon of Hagar mocking; and it is likely they had both periſhed, had not an angel, calling out of heaven, directed Hagar to a well of water. And perhaps, the ſame angel, who, when ſhe before fled from Sarah, who had dealt hardly with her; bid her return, and ſubmit: But in this laſt domeſtic quarrel, God himſelf miraculouſly interpoſes, and ſays, in all that Sarah has ſaid unto thee, hearken unto her voice.* But begging pardon for this interruption, pray go on.

A. We, certainly, ought to adhere ſtrictly to the light of nature; if, (as a learned and reverend critic, Nye, obſerves) "It muſt be allowed by the judicious and impartial, that many corruptions are found in our preſent copies of the holy bible; and that we have not now this bleſſed book in that perfection and integrity, that it was firſt written. It is altered in many places, and in ſome of the greateſt moment.—I could prove, I think, by undeniable and unavoidable inſtances, what Mr. Gregory of Oxford ſays in his Preface to ſome critical notes on the ſcripture, that he publiſhed. There is no Author whatſoever, ſays this learned critic, that

* Gen. xx. 6. 17. xvi. 3. xxi. 9. 19. xvi. 6. 9. xxi. 12.

has ſuffered ſo much by the hand of time as the bible has." If this, I ſay, muſt be allowed, ought we not in order to prevent all miſtakes, in the firſt place to get clear Ideas of the moral character of the divine being; and when by reaſons much ſtronger than any drawn from human tradition, we have diſcovered his character, ought we not to compare what we are told of him, by what we already know of him, and ſo judge of what men teach us concerning God, by what God himſelf teaches us; for we are all taught of him; and then we ſhall be as certain, as there is a God perfectly wiſe, and infinitely good, that no doctrines can come from him that have not theſe characters ſtamped on them. Thus were there more falſe readings crept into the ſcripture than theſe divines ſuppoſe, yet we might ſtill know our duty; and be certain that by doing our beſt to promote our mutual happineſs, we anſwer the end of our Creation; and that if we deviate from this rule for the ſake of what depends on human tradition, we quit certainty for that, which is not pretended to amount to more than Probability.

And it is no ſmall encouragement for us to obſerve this rule, ſince we find, that men, if like pedants, or ſchool-maſters, they read books, not to examine the force and cogency of the arguments they meet with; but for the ſake of words and phraſes, without conſidering the nature, reaſon and tendency of things; underſtanding very little of things. Have not great numbers from age to age, though men of good natural parts, had their underſtandings confounded by thus injudiciouſly employing them; and inſtead of clearing doubts increaſed them; and filled the world with uſeleſs criticiſms, and trifling diſputes? While they, who made words give place to things, and argued from the relation things bear to each other, have ſhewn themſelves able caſuiſts; and inriched the world with moſt uſeful diſcourſes, for promoting the honor of God, and the good of man. And therefore, we are often cautioned by the beſt authors, not to ſtick too cloſe to the letter in reading the

ſcripture; ſince they ſay the ſtyle of holy writ is far from being exact; and that the laying too great ſtreſs on words, has been the occaſion of moſt of the diſputes among chriſtians.

To ſhew how little we are to depend on words and phraſes; they ſay, a number of texts might be produced to prove Moſes to be a God: "For he is called God and Lord*; and prayed to, under that appellation, to forgive ſin†; has attributed to the ſame miraculous work of bringing the children of Iſrael out of Egypt, as is aſcribed to God; that the Iſraelites did believe in him, as well as in the Lord‡, and were required ſo to do; that he promiſed rain in due ſeaſon to ſuch as keep his commandments; and to Joſhua, that he would be with him in carrying the people into Canaan; although as a man, he was to die before: That he did great works; yea, miracles in the ſight of the Iſraelites, on purpoſe that they might know that he was the Lord their God§; that Aaron is ſaid to be his prophet‖, which is proper to the true God only; and in fine, that the Iſraelites were baptized unto, or into Moſes¶.

Theſe authors tell us, that in the Ethicks of Ariſtotle, in the offices of Tully, in the moral treatiſes of Grotius, Puffendorf, &c. the nature and reaſon of our duties, the connexion between them, and the dependance they have on one another are plainly ſeen; but in the ſcripture, things, ſay they, are not ſo generally treated, as that men may preciſely know the nature and extent of their duty. Are they not, ſay they, for the moſt part, delivered in ſuch a general, undermined, nay, ſometimes parabolical and hyperbolical manner, as did we not conſult our reaſon, and learn our duty from thence, the letter might lead us wrong; nay, the apoſtle himſelf ſays, the letter killeth.

B. I cannot believe things of any moment are thus re-

* Exod. vii. 1. 4. 6. † Num. xii. 11 ‡ Exod. x. 19, 17. xxxii. 7. xxxiii. 1. xix. 9. § Deut. xi. 13, 14, 15, &c. ‖ Exod. vii. ¶ 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

prefented; becaufe, as God could have no other end in giving us a revelation, than the rightly directing our minds; fo that end could not have been anfwered, except it was delivered in a way moft plain, and eafy to be underftood in all times and places: For if there are propofitions in fcripture, which naturally tend to mislead us; or if the ufe of languages is perverted in fome inftances, how can we be certain, but it may be in others?

A. Is not the new teftament full of parables, nay, is it not faid, that without a parable Jefus fpake not to the multitude;* and for this remarkable reafon, that feeing they might fee, and not perceive; and hearing they might hear, and not underftand left at any time they fhould be converted, and their fins be forgiven them?† Is not St. John's Gofpel, for the moft part, writ after an obfcure, allegorical manner, efpecially in relation to the perfon of Chrift? And do not commentators own, we labor under much the fame difficulties in interpreting St. Paul? The honorable Mr. Boyle fays, "that fometimes in St. Paul's writings many paffages are fo penned as to contain a tacit kind of a dialogue; and that unfkilfully by readers, and even interpreters, taken for an argument, which, indeed is an objection. It is faid it was the way of the eaft, to make ufe of dark and involved fentences, figurative and parabolical difcourfes, abrupt and maimed ways of expreffing themfelves, with a neglect of annexing tranfitions."

As for hyperbolical expreffions, it was cuftomary among the eaftern nations to expreis themfelves after a pompous and moft high-ftrained manner. This way of fpeaking was a main part of learning, taught in the fchools of the prophets among the Jews; and happy was he, who could moft excel in this elevated, romantic way; and both the old and new teftament abound with expreffions of this nature. Ifaiah, in prophecying the deftruction of Babylon, fays—the ftars of heaven fhall not give

* Mat. xiii. 34. † Mark iv. 12.

their light, the ſun ſhall be darkened.——I will ſhake the heavens, and the earth ſhall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hoſt, and in the day of his fierce anger.* And the deſtruction of the city of Jeruſalem in the New Teſtament is deſcribed after ſuch a manner, as if nature was unhinged, and the univerſe diſſolving.

Biſhop Fleetwood, on pſalm xviii ſays, that "without remembering David's hiſtory, one would imagine heaven and earth were moved in his behalf; and that the courſe of nature had been overthrown, and his life covered by continual miracles:" And he there obſerves, that "the Jewiſh expreſſions, and the expreſſions of all people that dwelt eaſtward are full of pomp, and amplification of fancy and hyperbole." And I think under this head we may reckon theſe texts, that all the kings of the earth ſought the preſence of Solomon.† That if the things which Jeſus did were written, the world itſelf could not contain the books.‡ And are not moſt of the expreſſions of St. John as figurative, as eating the fleſh, and drinking the blood of the ſon of man? and what monſtrous practices did thoſe words taken literally produce, even in the primitive times; and what ſenſeleſs diſputes ſince? And,

Muſt we not put under this head a number of other texts? Whatever you ſhall aſk in my name, that will I do.§ If two of you ſhall agree on earth, touching any thing they ſhall aſk, it ſhall be done for them of my father, which is in heaven.‖ If you have faith as a grain of muſtard ſeed, you ſhall remove mountains, and nothing ſhall impoſſible to you.¶ And you may ſay to this ſycamine tree, be thou plucked up by the roots, and be thou planted in the ſea, and it ſhall obey you.** Whatſoever thou ſhalt bind on earth, ſhall be bound in heaven.†† He that is ſpiritual, judgeth all things; (which

* Iſa. xiii. 10. 13. † 2 Chron. ix. 23. ‡ John xxi. 25. § John xiv. 13. ‖ Mat. xviii. 19. ¶ Mat. xvii. 20. ** Luke xvii. 6. †† Mat. xvi. 19.

the papiſts ſay is the pope) yet he himſelf is judged of no man. Things preſent, and things to come; all are yours.* St. John's little children are ſaid to have an unction, and to know all things.† And what more could be ſaid of the anointed, or Chriſt himſelf? Men are bid to be partakers of the divine nature;‡ and to be as perfect as their heavenly father is perfect.§ What bleſſings are not chriſtians promiſed, even in this life? Is it not ſaid, Chriſt has made us kings and prieſts unto God;——and we ſhall reign on the earth?‖ And are not the meek to inherit the earth? And, is not every one that hath forſaken houſes, or brethren, or ſiſters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my ſake, to receive an hundred fold, and to inherit everlaſting life?¶ What one is ſent to declare is to be done, that he is ſaid to do: So Jeremiah is ſaid to be ſet over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, pull down, and deſtroy.*a What is deſigned to be done, ſhall be ſaid to be actually done: As the lamb ſlain from the foundation of the world.†b Before Abraham was, I was;‡c or as we (to make it more myſterious) render it, I am: Nay, a creature not born long before, is ſaid to be the firſt born of every creature.§d Advice is called ſubmiſſion, ſubjection, and obedience; Ye younger ſubmit yourſelves to the elder; yea, be ſubject to one another.‖e Obey them that have the rule over you; and ſubmit yourſelves.¶f Perſuaſion is called compulſion, as compel them to walk in.*aa And what rooting work have not the papiſts made from this text: Every plant my heavenly father hath not planted ſhall be rooted up;†bb and ſuch other miſapplied places; Is not God's permitting evil, called doing it? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?‡cc

* 1 Cor. ii. 15. iii. 22. † 1 John ii. 20. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 4. § Mat. v. 48. ‖ Rev. i. 6. v. 10. ¶ Mat. v. 5. xix. 29. *a Jer. i. 10. †b Rev. xiii. 8. ‡c John viii. 58. §d Col. i. 15. ‖e 1 Pet. v. 5. ¶f Heb. xiii. 17. *aa Luke xiv. 23. †bb Mat. xv. 13. ‡cc Amos iii. 6.

Nay, is not the Lord ſaid to have created evil?* And to have hardened men's hearts; and then to puniſh them for their being hardened? And to tempt men? Are we not to pray againſt God's leading us into temptation? Nay, is not God, if the words are to be taken literally, repreſented as an arbitrary being, hating children not yet born; neither having done any good, or evil? Jacob have I loved, but Eſau have I hated.——Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth. Hath not the potter power over his clay?†———

Are not things in ſcripture abſolutely condemned, which are only ſo conditionally? As the Jewiſh rites and ſacrifices are, in the old teſtament, repreſented as an iniquity, and an abomination to the Lord. Things commanded are poſitively ſaid not to be commanded; As I ſpake not to your fathers, nor commanded them in that day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and ſacrifices.‡ What can be more figurative than Jeſus's ſaying, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and ſiſters, yea, and his own life alſo, he cannot be a diſciple?§ Things ſpoken in an unlimited, are to be taken in a reſtrained ſenſe: Swear not at all.‖ Children and ſervants, obey your parents and maſters in all things.¶ The love of money, is the root of all evil.*a* Whatſoever the phariſees bid you do, that do, and obſerve.†*b* Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceaſing. Prove all things.‡*c* And ſometimes a ſhort duration is expreſſed by the words for ever; or for everlaſting; or for the end of the world. So Jonah, after he came out of the fiſh's belly, ſays, The earth with her bars was about me for ever;§*d* and an hundred other ſuch texts. So that, whether any

* Iſa. xiv. 7. † Rom. ix. 11. 13. 18. 21. ‡ Jer. vii. 22. § Luke xiv. 26. ‖ Mat. v. 34. ¶ Eph. vi. 1, 5. *a* 1 Tim. vi. 10. †*b* Mat. xxiii. 3. ‡*c* 1 Theſſ. v. 16, 17, 21. §*d* Jonah ii. 6.

duration is to be everlaſting, (in the ſenſe we take that word) cannot be known from the words in ſcripture; but it muſt be judged of from the nature of the things which are ſaid thus to endure. But,

What can be more ſurpriſing, than Chriſt's declaring in moſt expreſs terms, he came to do that, which we muſt ſuppoſe he came to hinder: Think not, (ſays he) I am come to ſend peace; I come not to ſend peace, but a ſword.* For I am come to ſet a man at variance with his father, &c. And, ſuppoſe ye, I am come to give peace on earth; I tell you, nay; but rather diviſion. And again, I am come to ſend fire on earth, and what will I, if it be already kindled.† And has not that fire burnt outrageouſly ever ſince, being blown up by thoſe, whoſe buſineſs it was to have extinguiſhed it? And have they not ſo acted as if this was a prophetic ſaying, they were at all times bound to ſee fulfilled; though to the deſtruction of all moral duties whatever?

Another difficulty in underſtanding both the old and new teſtament, is, that moſt things, though owing to ſecond cauſes, are referred immediately to God. In the new teſtament, Pilate is ſaid to have his power from above,‡ even while he was condemning Jeſus. And there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God:§ Take heed, therefore, unto yourſelves, and to all the flock, over the which the holy ghoſt hath made you overſeers.‖ Nay, every good motion is imputed to the ſpirit, whether with or without underſtanding. I will pray with the ſpirit, and with the underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the ſpirit, and with the underſtending alſo.¶ Or, if a man talked in an unknown tongue, and could not interpret what he ſaid; or any of the congregation underſtood him; yet it was propheſying, and the gift of the ſpirit. And St. Paul calls a heathen poet prophet. And is not ſpirit, nay, the ſpirit of God, taken, at leaſt, in twenty different ſenſes in the ſcripture?

* Mat. x. 24. † Luke xii. 51. 49. ‡ John xix 11.
§ Rom. xiii 1. ‖ Acts xx. 28. ¶ 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

In ſhort, the words of ſcripture, on which things of the greateſt conſequence depend, are as is ſhewn by a learned author, ſome times taken, not only in a different, but contary ſenſe, however, to give one inſtance, nature in Rom. ii. 14, and nature in Eph. ii. 3. if rightly tranſlated, are taken in oppoſite ſenſes; and that word in 1 Cor. xi. 24. is taken in a ſenſe different from both.

How can we know from ſcripture, what things are owing immediately to God, or to ſecond cauſes; ſince every thing was thought to be good, not only the powers and faculties of the minds of men, but voluntary actions themſelves, are immediately aſcribed to God. For inſtance, Bezaleel is ſaid to be filled with the ſpirit of God in wiſdom, and underſtanding; becauſe he could deviſe cunning works of gold and ſilver, &c.* And the prophet Iſaiah, after he had deſcribed the whole art of plowing and ſowing, ſays the plowman, His God does inſtruct him to diſcretion, and teach him.—— And ſpeaking of the art of threſhing, he ſays, This alſo comes from the Lord of hoſt, which is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working.† Can the clergy have a better pretence to a *jure-divino-ſhip*, than the plowman and threſher? Where is it ſaid of them, that their God inſtructs them to diſcretion, and teaches them? Or, that their art comes from the Lord of hoſt, which is wonderful in counſel, and excellent in working?

As ſome things are immediately referred to God, ſo are others immediately referred to ſatan; nay, the ſame action is imputed both to God and ſatan. Theſe few, among numberleſs inſtances, I mention, to ſhew, that the ſcripture ſuppoſes, that from our reaſon we have ſuch infallible teſts, to judge what is the will of God, that we are ſafe from being miſled by any expreſſions of this nature.

B. Surely, the moral precepts delivered by our ſaviour, are not expreſſed thus obſcurely.

* Exod. xxxi. 3, 4. † Iſaiah xxviii. 26, 29.

A. Theſe, no doubt, are the plaineſt; yet even theſe, generally ſpeaking, are not to be taken in their obvious and literal meaning: As for inſtance, Lend, hoping for nothing again.* He that takes away thy coat, let him have thy cloak alſo.† Of him, who takes away thy goods, aſk them not again.‡ And ſhould we not, without having recourſe to the reaſon of things, be apt to think, that the poor, as ſuch, were the only favorites of heaven: Bleſſed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God. Bleſſed are ye that hunger, for ye ſhall be filled. And ſhould we not be likewiſe apt to imagine, that the goſpel was an enemy to the rich, as ſuch; and conſequently, to all thoſe methods which make a nation rich: As, Woe unto you rich; for you have your conſolation. It is eaſier for a camel to paſs through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. And that no man might be rich, it was a general precept, Sell what ye have, and give alms.§ Nay, the woman that caſt into the treaſury her two mites is commended, becauſe ſhe caſt in all ſhe had, even all her living. And to ſhew that none were exempt from this precept, Jeſus ſays to the man, who had obſerved all the precepts from his youth, one thing thou lackeſt, ſell whatever thou haſt, and give to the poor.‖ This precept is impracticable in a chriſtian ſtate, becauſe there could be no buyers where all were to be ſellers; and ſo is a community of goods, though in uſe among the Eſſenes, and the chriſtians at firſt.

It is certain, that ſuch paſſages, as, bleſſed are they that mourn; bleſſed are they that weep; wo unto you that laugh now, ye ſhall mourn and weep:¶ and other texts about ſelf denial, and taking up the croſs; and take no thought for your life, what ye ſhall eat or what ye ſhall drink. Take no thought for the morrow; conſider the ravens, for they neither ſow, nor reap.*a——

* Luke vi. 35. † Mat. v. 40. ‡ Luke vi. 30, 20. 21, 34 xi. 25. xii. 33. § Mark xii. 44. x. 21. ‖ Mat. v. 4. ¶ Luke vi. 21, 25. *a Mat. vi. 25, 31.

Conſider the lilies, how they grow, they toil not, they ſpin not; and yet, I ſay, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of theſe.* It is certain, I ſay, that ſuch like texts have, by being interpreted literally, run men into monſtrous abſurdities?

From this text, reſiſt not evil; but whoever ſhall ſmite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other alſo; and ſome others of the like nature: not only the primitive fathers but a conſiderable ſect, even now among the proteſtants, think all ſelf-defence unlawful.

From theſe ſayings of our ſaviour, there are ſome eunuchs, which were born ſo from their mothers womb; and there are ſome eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themſelves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's ſake: the primitive fathers, who thought they ought not to put a different meaning on the word eunuch in the latter end of the verſe, from what it had twice before; believed it a piece of heroic virtue for men to caſtrate themſelves: and though by the Roman law, no one could be caſtrated without leave of the preſident, as Juſtin obſerves; yet he commends a youth, who performed this operation on himſelf without it, and you know that the biſhop of Alexandria highly approved this action in Origen, as an inſtance of heroic virtue; though afterwards, when he became his capital enemy, he as much condemned it. Do not theſe things ſufficiently ſhew, that we muſt not deviate one tittle from what our reaſon dictates in any of theſe important points? Nay, even the precept of forgiving injuries, not only ſeven, but ſeventy times ſeven,† except interpreted conſiſtently with what the light of nature dictates to be our duty, in preſerving our reputation, liberty, and property; and in doing all we can in our ſeveral ſtations, to hinder all injury and injuſtice from others, as well as ourſelves; would be a doctrine attended with fatal conſequences, ſo that the expediency, or even lawfulneſs of forgiving injuries, depends on

* Luke xi. 24, 27. Mat. v. 39. xix. 12. xviii. 22.

ſuch circumſtances as human diſcretion is to judge of.

As I am a member of the commonwealth, I cannot be a judge in my own cauſe: and though I may legally proſecute a man who has injured me, yet if the injury be but ſlight, and by my overlooking it, he may become my friend; common prudence will oblige me to forgive him: but if he, taking advantage of my good nature, injures me the more, and more frequently, becauſe he may do it with impunity; the precept of forgiving, tho' it forbids me to puniſh for puniſhment ſake, does no more in this caſe bar me of a legal remedy, than it does nations of reſenting national injuries: and all good governments oblige people, for the ſake of the common good, to proſecute thoſe who have injured them by robbing, ſtealing, or any other way of cheating or defrauding them. So it is the reaſon of things, which in all circumſtances, muſt determine us how to act; and conſequently, when this precept is truly ſtated, there is nothing new in it; but if it be not truly ſtated, it is ſuch a new doctrine, as may be attended with fatal conſequences.

Celſus ſays, that "the doctrine of forgiving injuries, was not peculiar to the chriſtians, though they taught it after a grocer manner." And Confucius thus expreſſes this doctrine, "acknowledge thy benefits by the return of benefits; but never revenge injuries."

B. Confucius, though he forbids the revenging injuries, yet he did not carry things to that ſtate of perfection, as to teach the loving our enemies; but on the contary maintains, "we may have an averſion for an enemy without deſiring revenge; the motions of nature are not always criminal: and it is the good man only, who can love, and hate with reaſon."

A. Are not the paſſions of love and hatred given us by God, to be exerciſed on proper objects? Actions, abſtractedly conſidered, are not the objects of love and hate, but perſons for the ſake of their actions: and are not the actions of ſome men too deteſtable to create in us any ſentiments, but of averſion; ſo as to oblige us to

bring them to condign punishment? Nay, must not we learn to hate ourselves, before we can learn to love those that hate us.

If we ought not, nay, cannot love the devil, because our enemy; how can we love those devils incarnate, these enemies of God and man, who hate, and persecute men for shewing their love to God, in following the dictates of conscience? If love carries with it complaisance, esteem, and friendship, and these are due to all men; what distinction can we then make between the best, and worst of men? Though God, it is true, makes the sun to shine, and the rain to fall on the evil and the good; and, indeed, how could it be otherwise in the present state of things; Yet certainly, he does not love evil men, though he bears with them for a time.

I am so far from thinking the maxims of Confucius, and Jesus Christ to differ; that I think the plain and simple maxims of the former, will help to illustrate the more obscure ones of the latter, accommodated to the then way of speaking. Our saviour saying, Ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy;* divines have, in vain, puzzled themselves to find out the text in the old law; for could they find it as they do other texts, that our saviour in the same chapter, by this way of speaking, refers to; it would only shew, that the divine precepts were not consistent with one another. Indeed, St. Paul says, If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head:† But treating him thus, cannot sure be an argument of love; since it is in order to have divine vengeance fall on his head.

B. Commentators agree, that these precepts of our saviour are not to be taken in the plain, obvious, and grammatical meaning of the words; but are to be so explained, limited, and restrained, as best serve to promote human happiness.

A. Suppose those precepts are capable of being thus

* Mat. v. 43. † Rom. xii. 20.

paraphraſed, yet how do we know this was the deſign of the preacher? The Eſſenes (a ſect our ſaviour never found fault with) had, as is plain from Philo and Joſephus, rules much the ſame; which they interpreted according to the plain and literal meaning: and the chriſtians, as I ſhall ſhew hereafter, for ſome centuries, underſtood moſt of theſe precepts after the ſame manner; believing that the nature of moral rules required they ſhould be thus interpreted; eſpecially ſuch as are deſigned to govern the actions of the moſt ignorant and illiterate; and taught too by a perſon, whoſe infinite knowledge muſt enable him ſo to expreſs himſelf, as that his words ſhould not be liable to the leaſt miſconſtruction.

B. However chriſtians at firſt depending on the grammatical, and obvious meaning of the words, might miſtake; yet reaſon taught them afterwards how they were to be interpreted.

A. Reaſon, then, muſt be our guide; and we muſt know our duty from the light of nature, antecedently to thoſe precepts; otherwiſe we could never know it, was our duty to put ſuch a ſenſe upon words, as they otherwiſe ſeem not to bear. Beſides

Should not rules concerning morality, be ſuited to men's particular circumſtances, plainly deſcribing that conduct which they require? Is not this the deſign of the municipal laws in every country? What benefit could ſubjects have, from laws written in ſuch a looſe, general, and undetermined manner; as lend hoping for nothing again: if any man will ſue thee at law, & take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak alſo: of him who takes away thy goods, aſk them not again; or thoſe other texts which ſeem to condemn the rich as ſuch, and require, not the ſetting the poor at work, but the ſelling all, and giving to the poor; or thoſe other precepts, which ſeem to forbid ſelf-defence; or require us to take no thought for your life; or for the morrow? and that too by arguments drawn from lilies, neither toiling nor ſpinning? The ſame may be ſaid of all general, and undetermined rules in the new teſtament, though more plainly deliver-

ed : as for inſtance, though it is ſaid, ſervants obey your maſters in all things ; and pleaſe them well in all things ; yet is the meaſure of obedience due from ſervants to maſters any otherwiſe to be learnt, than from the agreement of the parties, or the cuſtom of the country? It is ſaid, we are to render to Cæſar, the things that are Cæſar's ; but muſt we not learn from the laws in every nation, who is Cæſar? and what is his due? Otherwiſe we ſhould act like thoſe wicked prieſts, who, not long ſince, from general words of obedience, would have deſtroyed our happy conſtitution, and treacherouſly inveſted the prince with an abſolute power. We are to render all men their dues ; but what thoſe dues are, we are to learn from the reaſon of things and the laws of the country.

In a word, it is the tendency of actions, which makes them either good or bad ; they that tend to promote human happineſs are always good ; and thoſe that have a contrary tendency, are always bad. And it is the circumſtances men are under, by which we are to judge of the tendency of actions. As for inſtance, the killing a man, conſidered without its circumſtances, is an action neither good or bad ; but by the magiſtrate, when the public good requires ; or by a private man, when neceſſary for ſelf defence, is an action always good ; but done when the public good does not require it, when there is no ſuch danger, and with malice prepenſe ; it is always evil. Taking up arms againſt a Perſon entruſted with the protection of the common wealth, cannot be determined to be good, or bad, without conſidering circumſtances : if he has not abuſed his truſt, it will be rebellion, the higheſt of crimes ; but if he has betrayed that truſt, and opreſſed the community, then a juſt and neceſſary defence. Enjoying a woman, or luſting after her, cannot be ſaid, without conſidering the circumſtances, to be either good or evil ; that warm deſire, which is implanted in human nature, cannot be criminal when perſued after ſuch a manner, as tends moſt to promote the happineſs of the parties ; and to propogate and preſerve the ſpecies. What we call inceſt, is now for ma-

ny good reaſons not to be allowed of; yet it was a duty in the children of Adam and Eve: And if the neareſt of kin were now thrown on a deſert Iſland, I ſee no reaſon, but that they might act as the firſt born pair did.

Though there were ever ſo many texts in the New as well as the old teſtament againſt uſury, and thoſe too backed by the unanimous authority of all the fathers; yet the forbidding it, eſpecially in trading nations, would now be immoral; ſince without it induſtry would in a great meaſure be diſcouraged, arts unimproved and trade and commerce conſiſting chiefly in credit, deſtroyed. Beſides, what reaſon can be aſſigned, why a man ſhould any more lend his money, than let his lands for nothing? and when that common rule of doing as we would be done unto, ſuppoſes an action fit to be done; or at leaſt, without any ill tendency. Nay to go a little farther; was not the command of abſtaining from blood, given after the deluge to the then whole race of mankind, and often repeated in the law? and in the new teſtament, is not the ſame precepts enjoined the Gentile converts, by the unanimous decree of the apoſtles, and by the holy ghoſt too, as neceſſary? nay, equally ſo with the abſtaining from fornication; and thought by all chriſtians, for many ages, to be of perpetual obligation? yet who is now ſo ridiculous, as out of religion to abſtain from black-puddings? who now, to give another inſtance, thinks it his duty to waſh his neighbour's feet? though a thing not only commanded by a dying ſaviour, after the moſt ſolemn manner, and under no leſs penalty than having no part in him; but enforced, and inculcated by his own example. Our ſaviour commands men not to ſwear at all;* and St. James impreſſes the ſame precepts, by ſaying, above all things, ſwear not;† and by the manner of its being introduced by our ſaviour, it ſeems chiefly to relate to oaths taken on ſolemn occaſions: it is ſaid of old, thou ſhalt not forſwear thy ſelf, but ſhall perform unto the lord thine oaths; but I ſay

* Mat. v. 34. † James, v. 12.

unto you, ſwear not at all.*——And yet, who now, beſides Quakers, refuſe to ſwear at all? by theſe, you ſee, though ſeveral other inſtances might be produced, how chriſtians have, in the main, taken the tendency of actions to be the rule, to judge of their lawfulneſs or unlawfulneſs, goodneſs or badneſs: and in thoſe few things ſuperſtition has made them judge otherwiſe, has it not always been to their prejudice?

B. Is there no exception to this rule? Muſt men, at all times, make their words and thoughts agree; and never ſpeak, but juſt as they think?

A. The Rule I have laid down holds even here; for though ſpeech was given to men to communicate their thoughts and it is generally for their common good that men ſhould ſpeak as they think, yet this common good preſcribes certain reſtrictions: deceiving an enemy in a juſt war, either by words or actions, if it tends to bring about the end of war, peace; is certainly a duty: and the ſame reaſon obliges people not to keep thoſe promiſes, though ſworn to, which they have been forced to make to robbers and thieves. And ſome go ſo far as to think, that thoſe who would force others to declare their opinions to their own prejudice, in ſuch matters where the government has no concern; have no more right to truth than robbers, and other public enemies.

Friendſhip will ſometimes oblige men to deceive people, when it manifeſtly tends to their good, and none are prejudiced by it; and all practice it with relation to children, ſick people, and men in paſſion: muſt not he be an ill man, indeed, who would not ſave an innocent perſon, by telling his purſuer a falſhood? This is a duty he owes to both, purſuer and purſued. And if men (as none ſcruple it) may bid their ſervants ſay, they are not at home; and do ſeveral other things of this nature: why may they not, when ſilence will be interpreted into prejudice, deceive impertinent people, in ſuch matters where they have

* Mathew, v. 33, 34.

no concern? Thus, you ſee, there are certain exceptions to this rule, which, as well as the rule itſelf, are built on the good of mankind; and yet theſe exceptions will by no means juſtify mental reſervations, or equivocations.

The children of Iſrael, in the time of the judges, were certainly none of the beſt caſuiſts; who, when in a quarrel (the oddeſt that ever was) having ſworn before the lord at Miſpath, not to give any of their daughters to wife to Benjamin; and, in purſuance of this quarrel, deſtroyed them with their wives and children, except 600, who eſcaped by flying into a cave; and then reflecting that a whole tribe would be loſt, if they did not give them wives; and their oaths, accompanied with a curſe, violated, if they did; found out theſe two expedients: the men of Jabeſh Gilead, not concerning themſelves in the quarrel, nor coming to the general aſſembly, they deſtroyed with their wives and children, except 400 virgins; whom they gave for wives to theſe Benjamites: but theſe not being a ſufficient number, they adviſed, nay, commanded them to ſeize on ſome of their daughters as they were dancing, and to carry them off. Thus theſe merciful and religious people preſerved their oaths, and their brother Benjamin.*

B. The Hebrew midwives, no doubt, acted according to your rule in deceiving Pharaoh, by not deſtroying the Hebrew male children; becauſe they ſaid, they feared God, and God dealt well with them, and made them houſes; but there is another precedent in the ſame hiſtory, which ſeems very ſurpriſing: the Lord though he told Moſes, and the elders of Iſrael, his real deſign of bringing his people out of Egypt into the land of the Canaanites: yet bids them ſay to the king of Egypt, let us go three days journey into the wilderneſs, that we may ſacrifice to the Lord our God; leſt he fall upon us with peſtilence, or with the ſword;

* Judges, xi. 1. 8. 19. 20. 31.

we cannot ſacrifice in the land, for we ſhall ſacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians; our cattle muſt go with us, for thereof we muſt ſerve the Lord. And at laſt, when Pharaoh, whoſe heart God had frequently hardened, complied with their requeſt, he bids them go ſerve the lord as ye have ſaid; and upon this occaſion, they borrowed of the Egyptians, as the lord ordered them, jewels of gold and ſilver, and raiment, even to the ſpoiling of them; and when Pharaoh (who all along ſeemed jealous of their deſign, and bids them not go far away;*) found that this ſolemn ſacrifice was a mere pretence; and that they really fled with all they had borrowed of his people, he purſued the fugitives; the conſequence was, that the Egyptians, inſtead of obtaining reſtitution, were miraculouſly deſtroyed, and Pharaoh loſt his life as well as his ſubjects; and thoſe who had dealt thus treacherouſly with them, were as miraculouſly preſerved.

A. As to this point, I can only adviſe you to conſult our learned commentators, who will ſatisfy you in this matter, as well as why the terror of the Lord hindered juſtice to be done upon the two ſons of Jacob,† for the vileſt piece of cruelty and treachery they committed on the Shechemites. But not to meddle with things foreign to our purpoſe.

I will venture to ſay, that this rule of acting according as the circumſtances we are under, point out to us to be for the general good, is a rule without exception; whereas all other general rules are of little uſe, when applied to particular caſes; becauſe of the many exceptions to them, founded on other rules, equally general; and further, that this univerſal, and unexceptionable rule is highly neceſſary, in explaining all the precepts of our ſaviour; eſpecially thoſe relating to loving of enemies, and forgiving injuries. And the rather, becauſe,

* Exod. i. 17, 20, 21. iii. 8. 18. v. 3. viii. 26. xix. 26. xii. 31. xii. 35, 36. viii. 28. † Gen. xxxv. 5.

The eccleſiaſtics, though they cry up the precepts of men's loving their own enemies; yet they effectually evade this, and all other moral precepts, by telling them it is their duty to hate the enemies of God; and thoſe to be ſure are the enemies of God, who refuſe blindly to ſubmit to their dictates; eſpecially in matters relating to their power and profit: And have too found out many ways of making the precept of forgiving injuries uſeleſs; more particularly by telling men, that it is for the correction of manners, for the good of their own, as well as their neighbor's ſouls, that the ſpiritual courts are erected; where people, for ſuch haſty and angry words, as no action (there being no real damage) will lie for a common law, are to be cenſured. And thus numbers of ordinary people are, on this pretence, to the great benefit of thoſe courts, frequently undone; and ſpiteful perſons gratify their malice, without any ſatisfaction, but that of ruining their neighbors, and very often themſelves.

I might ſhew you, in ſupport of my never failing rule of judging of actions by their tendency, that we are carefully to diſtinguiſh between the actions of Jeſus himſelf; ſince in ſome (theſe being no otherwiſe to be accounted for) he, as divines themſelves own, acted by virtue of his prophetical office; theſe, conſequently, can be no precedent for us: But of this hereafter.

B. You have already, I muſt own, taken a great deal of pains, to ſhew, that God, in creating mankind, had no other deſign than their happineſs; and that all the rules he gave them (it being repugnant to his nature to have any arbitrary commands) could have no other tendency; and that by making them moral agents, he made them capable of knowing wherein their happineſs conſiſts; or in other words of diſcovering whatever the relations they ſtand in to God, and their fellow creatures, make fit to be obſerved.

And from thence you conclude, the happineſs of men, at one time as well as another, conſiſting in the ſame things; that the goſpel (which can make no alter-

ation in the relations men ſtand in to God, and one another, or the duties that flow from thence,) could only be a republication, or reſtoration of that religion, which is founded on the eternal reaſon of things: which, you ſuppoſe, is what we are ſtill governed by; ſince we are obliged to recede from the letter, though the words are ever ſo plain, if that recedes from the reaſon of things; as all own the letter does, in innumerable places relating to God himſelf; by imputing human parts, human infirmities, and human paſſions, even of the worſt kind, to him; and making thoſe the cauſe of many of his actions: And that as in the old teſtament there are ſeveral things, either commanded, or approved, which would be criminal in us to obſerve, becauſe we cannot reconcile our doing them with the reaſon of things; ſo in the new teſtament, its precepts are for the moſt part delivered either ſo hyperbolically, that they would lead men aſtray, when they were governed by the uſual meaning of words, or elſe expreſſed in ſo looſe, general, and undetermined a manner, that men are are as much left to be governed by the reaſon of things, as if there were no ſuch precepts: and the ſcripture not diſtinguiſhing between thoſe precepts which are occaſional, and which are not, we have no ways to diſtinguiſh them, but from the nature of things; which will point out to us thoſe rules, which eternally oblige, whether delivered in ſcripture or not.

Theſe ſentiments you ſo ſtrongly enforce, that I ſhould find it difficult not to yield, had I not ſo able a combatant as Dr. S. Clark, for my ſecond; who in his excellent diſcourſe of the unalterable obligation of natural religion, and the truth, and certainty of the chriſtian revelation; not only ſhews, that they are diſtinct religions; but the infinite advantage the latter has above the former: and though this good, as well as great man is dead, whereby the church has ſuſtained an irreparable loſs, yet he will for ever live in this immortal work.

CHAP. XIV.

Dr. Clark's diſcourſe of the unchangeable obligation of Natural Religion, and the truth and certainty of the Chriſtian Revelation, conſidered; and from thence it is ſhewn, how inconſiſtent ſoever with the deſign of that diſcourſe, that nothing can be a part of religion, but what is founded on the nature, and reaſon of things.

1. I OWN, the Doctor got immortal honour by that diſcourſe; how much it is admired, the ſeventh edition ſhews: and we may well imagine, an author, who uſually exhauſts the ſubject he writes on, has here omitted nothing that makes for his purpoſe. And, therefore, ſince it is your pleaſure, I will fully conſider this diſcourſe, and begin with the character he gives of the law of nature; and ſee whether he does not repreſent it ſo abſolutely perfect, as to take in every thing that God requires of mankind: and then examine what he ſays in behalf of revelation, in contradiction to the religion of nature.

The Doctor not only maintains, that "the law of nature is univerſal, and abſolutely unchangeable;" but has two ſections to prove, "that the will of God determines itſelf to act according to the eternal reaſon of things: and that all rational creatures are obliged to govern themſelves in all their actions by the ſame eternal rule of reaſon:" which ſuppoſes, that all rational creatures are not only only capable of kowing this eternal rule of reaſon, but likewiſe knowing there can be no other rule, for the actions both of God and man. In his previous

diſcourſe of the being of a God, he affirms, that "they, who are not governed by this law, are for ſetting up their own unreaſonable ſelf-will, in oppoſition to nature, and reaſon of things—acting contrary to their own reaſon and knowledge; attempting to deſtroy that order, by which the univerſe ſubſiſts; and by conſequence, offering the higheſt affront imaginable to the creator of all things, who himſelf governs all his actions by theſe rules, and cannot but require the ſame of all his reaſonable creatures." And in this diſcourſe he ſays, "the all-powerful creator and governor of the univerſe, who has the abſolute, and uncontroulable dominion of all things in his own hands, and is accountable to none for what he does, yet thinks it no diminution of his power, to make this reaſon of things the unalterable rule, and law of all his own actions in the government of the world, and does nothing by mere will and arbitrarineſs." And indeed, if God does nothing by mere will and arbitrarineſs, it is impoſſible there can be any other rule but the reaſon of things. And accordingly he ſays, "the eternal and unchangeable nature and reaſon of the things themſelves are the law of God; not only his creatures, but alſo himſelf, as being the rule of his own actions in the government of the world." And, as a learned prelate of our own has excellently ſhewn, "not barely his infinite power, but the rules of this eternal law, are the true foundation, and the meaſure of his dominion over his creatures. Now, for the ſame reaſon, that God, who hath no ſuperiour to determine him, yet conſtantly directs all his own actions by the eternal rule of juſtice and goodneſs; it is evident all intelligent creatures in their ſeveral ſpheres and proportions, ought to obey the ſame rule according to the law of nature." Which is ſuppoſing it would be tyranny in God to have any arbitrary commands, or give men any other rules, but the rules of this eternal law: the true foundation, and meaſure of his dominion over his creatures. And again, "God who is infinitely ſelf-ſufficient to his own happineſs, could have no motive to create things at all, but only that he might

communicate to them his goodneſs and happineſs." If ſo, they, who do all the good they can to themſelves, and fellow creatures, anſwer the end of their creation. "And he ſays, that in matters of natural reaſon and morality, that which is holy and good is not therefore holy and good, becauſe it is commanded to be done; but it is therefore commanded by God, becauſe it is holy and good;" which ſuppoſes that all God's commands, if they are holy and good, (between which I think, the diſtinction is only verbal;) are founded on the nature, and reaſon of things. And accordingly he ſays, "that God has made (his intelligent creatures) ſo far like himſelf, as to endue them with thoſe excellent faculties of reaſon and will, whereby they are enabled to diſtinguiſh good from evil, and to chooſe the one and refuſe the other."—Which ſuppoſes thoſe are the only things which God commands, or forbids; otherwiſe theſe excellent faculties would only enable them to know but part of the will of God; though God can will nothing but what is for their good, that being the ſole end of his creating them.

And he ſuppoſes, that "this law of nature is not founded in the poſitive will of God, but ariſes from the different relations and reſpects which things have to one another, which makes ſome things fit, and others unfit to be done:" and ſays, that "the law of nature has its full obligatory power, antecedent to all conſiderations of any particular private, and perſonal reward or puniſhment, annexed either by natural conſequence, or by poſitive appointment, to the obſervance, or neglect of it. This alſo is very evident: becauſe if good and evil, right or wrong, fitneſs or unfitneſs of being practiſed, be (as has been ſhewn) originally, eternally, and neceſſarily, in the nature of the things themſelves, it is plain, that the view of particular rewards or puniſhments, which is only an after conſideration, and does not at all alter the nature of things, cannot be the original cauſe of the obligation of the law, but is only an additional weight to enforce the practice of what men were before obliged to by right

reaſon." And to prove this he ſays, that "the judgment and conſcience of a man's own mind, concerning the reaſonableneſs, and fitneſs of the thing, that his actions ſhould be conformed to ſuch, or ſuch a rule or law; is the trueſt, or formalleſt obligation, even more properly and ſtrictly ſo, than any opinion whatever of the authority of the giver of a law, or any regard he may have to its ſanctions by rewards and puniſhments. For whoever acts contrary to this ſenſe, and conſcience of his own mind, is neceſſarily ſelf-condemned; and the greateſt, and ſtrongeſt of all the obligations is that, which a man cannot break through without condemning himſelf." And,

He likewiſe affirms, "theſe eternal moral obligations, as they are really in perpetual force, merely from their own nature, and the abſtract reaſon of things; ſo alſo they are more over the expreſs and unalterable will, and command of God to his creatures, which he cannot but expect ſhould, in obedience to his ſupreme authority, as well as in compliance with the natural reaſon of things, be regularly, and conſtantly obſerved through the whole creation." Which not only ſuppoſes, the reaſon of things, and the divine commands are inſeparable: but that it is the reaſon, or fitneſs of the thing, that makes it a divine law; and conſequently, that they who never heard of any external revelation; yet if they knew from the nature of things, what is fit for them to do, they know all that God will, or can require of them; ſince his commands are to be meaſured by the antecedent fitneſs of things: and things can only be ſaid to be fit, or unfit, but as they are for, or againſt the common good.— And if the creator will do every thing, the relation he ſtands in to his creatures makes fit for him to do; and expects nothing from them, but what the relation they ſtand in to him, and one another, makes likewiſe fit for them to do; how can they be ignorant of their duty? eſpecially, if, as the doctor demonſtrates, "all the ſame reaſons and arguments, which diſcover to men the natural fitneſſes, or unfitneſſes of things, and the neceſſary

perfections, or attributes of God; prove equally at the same time, that that, which is truly the law of nature, or the reason of things, is in like manner the will of God." And,

He justly observes, that though "this method of deducing the will of God from his attributes; is of all other the best and clearest, the certainest, and most universal, that the light of nature affords; yet there are other collateral considerations, which prove, and confirm the same." And that,

"The same may be proved from the tendency, and practice of morality, to the good and happiness of the whole world:" which, indeed, would be no proof, were any thing commanded that had no tendency; for such things, according to the penalties they were to be enforced by, would be more or less to the hurt of mankind.

To shew the natural connexion there is between all the parts of religion, he says, "who believes the being, and natural attributes of God, must of necessity confess his moral attributes also. Next, he who owns, and has just notions of the moral attributes of God, cannot avoid acknowledging the obligations of morality, and natural religion. In like manner, he who owns the obligations of morality and natural religion, must needs, to support those obligations, and make them effectual in practice, believe a future state of rewards and punishments." And he affirms, that "the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, is in general deducible, even demonstrably, by a chain of clear, and undeniable reasoning:" nay, he says, "it is a proposition in a manner self-evident." And speaking of some argument he had before mentioned, he says, "These are very good, and strong arguments for the great probability of a future state; but that drawn from the consideration of the moral attributes of God, seems to amount even to a demonstration; nay, to a complete demonstration."

In short, the Doctor's hypothesis is, that upon God's framing mankind after the manner he has done, there

are certain things reſulting from thence, which naturally, and neceſſarily conduce to their good or hurt; and that the way to know the will of God, is to know what thoſe things are, in order to do the one, and to avoid the other. For which reaſon God gave man underſtanding, which (without blaſpheming the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of God) muſt be allowed to be ſufficient to anſwer the end for which it was given. And that a being infinitely wiſe and good, as well as wholly diſintereſted, can require nothing of men, but what they, for the ſake of their own intereſt, though there were no poſitive divine commands, were obliged to do; and conſequently, that whoever acts for his own good, in ſubſerviency to that of the public, anſwers the end of his creation. As this ſcheme of things, to do the doctor juſtice, gives us the higheſt idea of the goodneſs, wiſdom, and the perfection of the divine being; ſo to compleat his moral character, the Doctor repreſents the laws of God, by which mankind are to govern all their actions, moſt plain and obvious, and even impreſſed on human nature. And therefore ſays, that

"All rational creatures are obliged to govern themſelves, in all their actions, by the eternal reaſon of things, is evident from the ſenſe, all, even wicked men, unavoidably have of their being under ſuch an obligation; and from the judgment of the conſciences of men on their own actions." And that "the moſt profligate of all mankind, however induſtriouſly they endeavor to conceal, and deny their ſelf-condemnation, yet cannot avoid making a diſcovery of it ſometimes when they are not aware of it." And that no man, but "by the reaſon of his mind, cannot but be compelled to own, and acknowledge, that there is really ſuch an obligation indiſpenſably incumbent upon him," and "they who do evil, yet ſee, and approve what is good, and condemn in others what they blindly allow in themſelves; nay, very frequently condemn even themſelves alſo, not without great diſorder, and uneaſineſs of mind in thoſe very things wherein they allow themſelves," and he can, give

me leave to say, consists the excellency of the law of nature, that though a man is so brutish as not to observe it himself, yet he would have all others religiously observe it; and no rule can be calculated for the general good, but what is so framed: and if men would make this a test of the will of God, how happy would they be.

The Doctor more fully to prove this point, says, that "the mind of man naturally, and necessarily assents to the eternal law of righteousness, may still better, and more clearly, and more universally appear, from the judgment that men pass on each others actions, than what we can discern concerning their consciousness of their own." And that he shews, that "the unprejudiced mind of man as naturally disapproves injustice in moral matters, as in natural things it cannot but dissent from falsehood, or dislike incongruities." And again,

"The case is truly thus, that the eternal differences of good and evil, the unalterable rule of right and equity, do necessarily, and unavoidably determine the judgment, and force the assent of all that use any consideration, is undeniably manifest from the universal experience of mankind. For no man willingly, and deliberately transgresses this rule in any great, and considerable instance; but he acts contrary to the judgment, and reason of his own mind, and secretly reproaches himself for so doing: and no man observes, and obeys it steadily, especially in cases of difficulty and temptation, when it interferes with any present interest, pleasure, or passion; but his own mind commends, and applauds him for his resolution, in executing what his conscience could not forbear giving its assent to, as just and right. And this is what St. Paul means, when he says, (Rom. ii. 14. 15.) that when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law." And in another place he says, "No man does good, brave, and generous actions, but the reason of his own mind applauds him for his so doing; and no man, at any time, does things base, vile, dishonorable, and wicked; but

at the ſame time he condemns himſelf." And he ſays, "that the eternal rule of right ought as indiſpenſably to govern the actions of men, as it cannot but neceſſarily determine their aſſent.

One would be apt to think, that the doctor believed that man without reflection, could not but know the law of nature, and be in love with it; ſince he ſays, "that in reading hiſtories of far and diſtant countries, where it is manifeſt we can have no concern for the event of things, nor prejudices concerning the characters of perſons; who is there that does not praiſe and admire, nay, highly eſteem, and in his imagination love, as it were, the equity, truth, juſtice, and fidelity of ſome perſons; and with the greateſt indignation and hatred deteſt the barbarity and injuſtice of others? Nay further, when the prejudice of corrupt minds lie all on the ſide of injuſtice, as when we have obtained ſome very great profit or advantage, through another man's treachery, or breach of faith; yet who is there, that upon that very occaſion does not (even to a proverb) diſlike the perſon, and the action, how much ſoever he may rejoice at the event.

Theſe reaſons ſhew the infinite goodneſs of God, by not only thus deeply impreſſing that law on human nature, by which God expects all men ſhould govern all their actions, but in making the very obſerving of this law, to carry with it, diſtinct from the good it produces, the higheſt ſatisfaction, and rational enjoyment; and the contrary, that ſorrow, remorſe, and ſelf-condemnation, which are the unavoidable conſequences of acting againſt it: and of this the philoſophers of old, and I believe all ſince, who do not adulterate religion with things that are not moral; and conſequently, carry no ſatisfaction with them, muſt be ſenſible: But as it would be endleſs, to mention all the doctor ſays of the irreſiſtable evidence, as well as the abſolute perfection of the eternal, and immutable law of nature; I ſhall recite but one paſſage more, which he ſupports by the authority of biſhop Cumberland. "This"

ſays he "is that law of nature, to which the reaſon of all men, every where, as naturally and neceſſarily aſſents, as all animals conſpire in the pulſe, and motion of their heart and arteries; or as all men agree in their judgment concerning the whiteneſs of ſnow, or the brightneſs of the ſun."

B. This, indeed, is ſo full and home, that no ancient or modern deiſt could have ſaid more in praiſe of the unlimited wiſdom, and univerſal goodneſs of God; than in ſuppoſing the common parent of mankind, has given all his children, even thoſe of the loweſt capacities, and at all times, ſufficient means, of diſcovering whatever makes for their preſent, and future happineſs; and that no man can plead ignorance of a law as evident as that the Sun is bright, or ſnow white; and as inſeparable from rational nature, as the pulſe of the heart and arteries are from animal nature.

A. If this be talking like a deiſt, all who write on this ſubject talk thus, ſince they all maintain that "there muſt be a law of eternal rectitude flowing from the nature of things, otherwiſe there could be no actions good, or lovely in themſelves; no real diſtinction between virtue and vice; good or evil; and that God cannot diſpenſe with his creatures, or with himſelf, for not obſerving it; otherwiſe an arbitrary will, which might change every moment, would govern every thing;" and that "this law of eternal rectitude is implanted in man at his very creation; and that no man can act contrary to it, but does violence to himſelf, and ſins againſt his very make, and conſtitution." And can it be otherwiſe, when the only innate principle in man is the deſire of his own happineſs; and the goodneſs of God requires no more than a right cultivating this principle; in preferring a general, or public; to a particular, or private good? And where there are two evils, and both cannot be avoided, to chooſe the leſs *ſub ratione boni.*

The latter part of the Doctor's diſcourſe is chiefly levelled againſt thoſe he calls the true deiſts; and that

you may know what ſort of men they are he combats, he gives you their creed.

"Theſe deiſts, ſays he, did they believe what they pretend, have juſt, and right notions of God, and of all the divine attributes in every reſpect; who declare they believe there is one eternal, infinite, intelligent, all-powerful, and wiſe being; the creator preſerver and governor of all things; that this ſupreme cauſe is a being of infinite juſtice, goodneſs and truth, and all moral as well as natural perfections; that he made the world for the manifeſtation of his power and wiſdom, and to communicate his goodneſs and happineſs to his creatures; that he preſerves it by his continual all-wiſe providence, and governs it according to the eternal rules of infinite juſtice, equity, goodneſs, mercy and truth; that all created, rational beings, depending continually upon him, are bound to adore, worſhip, and obey him; to praiſe him for all things they enjoy, and to pray to him for every thing they want; that they are obliged to promote in their proportion, and according to the extent of their ſeveral powers and abilities, the general good and welfare of thoſe parts of the world wherein they are placed: in like manner, as the divine goodneſs is continually promoting the univerſal benefit of the whole; that men in particular, are every where obliged to make it their buſineſs, by an univerſal benevolence to promote the happineſs of all others; that in order to this, every man is bound always to behave himſelf ſo toward others, as in reaſon he would deſire they ſhould in like circumſtances deal with him: wherefore he is obliged to obey, and ſubmit to his ſuperiors in all juſt, and right things, for the preſervation of ſociety, and the peace and benefit of the public; to be juſt and honeſt, equitable and ſincere in all his dealings with his equals, for the keeping inviolable the everlaſting rule of righteouſneſs, and maintaining an univerſal truſt and confidence; friendſhip and affection amongſt men; and towards his inferiors to be gentle and kind, eaſy and affable, charitable and willing to aſſiſt as many as ſtand in need of his help, for the preſervation

of univerſal love and benevolence amongſt mankind, and in imitation of the goodneſs of God, who preſerves, and does good to all his creatures, which depend entirely upon him for their very being, and all that they enjoy; that in reſpect of himſelf, every man is bound to preſerve as much as in him lies, his own being, and the right uſe of all his faculties, ſo long as it ſhall pleaſe God, who appointed him his ſtation in this world, to continue him therein; that therefore, he is bound to have an exact government of his paſſions, and carefully to abſtain from all debaucheries and abuſes of himſelf, which tend either to the diſtruction of his own being, or to the diſorders of his faculties, and diſabling him from performing his duty, or hurrying him into the practice of unreaſonable and unjuſt things: laſtly, that according as men regard, or neglect theſe obligations, ſo they are proportionably acceptable, or diſpleaſing unto God; who being ſupreme governor of the world, cannot but teſtify his favour or diſpleaſure, at ſome times, or other; and conſequently, ſince this is not done in the preſent ſtate, therefore there muſt be a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments in a life to come."

The deiſts, no doubt, will own, that the Doctor has done them juſtice; ſince all their principles, as he repreſents them, have a direct tendency to make them good men; and containing nothing to divert them from intirely attending to all the duties of morality, in which the whole of their religion conſiſts; and which leaves them no room for thoſe endleſs quarrels and fatal diviſions, which zeal for other things, has occaſioned among their fellow creatures; and whom they pity upon the account of that unſupportable bondage, which ſuperſtition has, in moſt places, laid them under: and muſt not a religion, which the Doctor has proved to be demonſtrably founded on the eternal reaſon of things, have a more powerful influence on rational beings, than if it was laid on any other bottom? How can a religion, which, as the the Doctor deſcribes it, carries in all its parts, ſuch evident marks of wiſdom and goodneſs, fail to make men

in love with their duty ; when they muſt plainly ſee, that, and their intereſt to be inſeparable ? If princes required no more of their ſubjects, and private men of their neighbours, than to be governed by theſe principles ; how happy would the world be, thus governed ?

I do not perceive the Doctor himſelf finds any defect in their principles ; but only objects to their manner of taking them as they are diſcoverable by the light of nature, and the reaſon of things.

B. Is not that a very juſt objection ?

A. Not from one who ſuppoſes,that " the eternal reaſon of things ought to be the rule by which all men ſhould govern all their actions ;" and who among other things of the like nature, affirms, that the " original obligation of all is the eternal reaſon of things ; that reaſon, which God himſelf, who has no ſuperior to direct him, or to whoſe happineſs nothing can be added, or any thing diminiſhed from it, yet conſtantly obliges himſelf to govern the world by : and the more excellent and perfect his creatures are, the more chearfully, and ſteadily are their wills determined by this ſupreme obligation, in conformity to the nature and imitation of the moſt perfect will of God.

B. Why do you think this favours deiſm ?

A. Becauſe, if the eternal reaſon of things is the ſupreme obligation, muſt not that, if there is any difference between it and external revelation, take place ? And muſt not that rule, which can annul any other, be not only the ſupreme, but the ſole rule ? For as far as men take any other rule, ſo far they looſe of their perfection, by ceaſing to be governed by this rule, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will of God. And if this moſt perfect will of God is to be thus known, can things that have another original, and are of a later date, be any part of the moſt perfect will of God ? Or can the eternal reaſon of things extend to things that do not belong to reaſon ; or, as divines love to ſpeak, are above reaſon ; or, can the Doctor ſuppoſe, there is any other rule, than the nature, or reaſon of things, when he

makes no medium between men's being governed by it, and by their own unreaſonable will?

In ſhort, it is the view with which the action is done, that makes it moral: He, who pays his debts out of a principle of honeſty, does a moral action; while he that does the ſame for fear of the law, cannot be ſaid to act morally: And can he, who does a thing to avoid being puniſhed, or in hopes of being rewarded hereafter; and for the ſame reaſon is ready to do the contrary; merit, at leaſt, equally with him, who is in love with his duty, and is governed, not by ſervile motives, but by the original obligation of the moral fitneſs of things; in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will of God. This the Doctor will not deny to be true deiſm; and that they who do not act thus, deſerve not the title of true deiſts.

The Doctor, after he has himſelf given us a conſiſtent ſcheme of deiſm, ſays, "There is now no ſuch thing, as a conſiſtent ſcheme of deiſm: That which alone was once ſuch——ceaſes now to be ſo, after the appearance of revelation." If chriſtianity, as well as deiſm, conſiſts in being governed by the original obligation of the moral fitneſs of things, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will of God; then they both muſt be the ſame: But if chriſtianity conſiſts in being governed by any other rule, or requires any other things, has not the Doctor himſelf given the advantage to deiſm?

Theſe true chriſtian deiſts, as, I think, the Doctor ought to call them, ſay; that though the Doctor's diſcourſe is chiefly levelled againſt them, yet he cannot differ with them, without differing from himſelf; and condemning in one part of his elaborate treatiſe, what he has approved in the other. For,

If chriſtianity has not, ſay they, deſtroyed the moral agency of men; or forbid them to act as moral agents; they muſt now, as well as formerly, judge of the will of God, by that reaſon given them by an all-gracious God, to diſtinguiſh between good and evil; the only things

to which the precepts of a being, who, as the Doctor owns, is incapable of acting arbitrarily, can extend; and these deists agree with the Doctor in his two first propositions, upon which, the whole of his reasoning is built: "That from the eternal, and necessary differences of things, there naturally arise certain moral obligations, which are of themselves incumbent on all rational creatures, antecedent to all positive institution, and to all expectation of reward and punishment." And,

"That the same eternal moral obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural differences of things, are moreover the express will and command of God to all rational creatures:" And accordingly they judge of the positive will of God, from those eternal moral obligations, which arise necessarily from the natural differences of things; which being incumbent on all rational creatures, antecedent to all positive institution, cannot but be so knowable by them, and having, agreeable to the Doctor's direction, thus chosen their religion, they say, it is impossible for them (since there cannot be two originals of the same thing) to choose that religion from external revelation, which they have already chosen from internal revelation: And if external revelation cannot alter the nature of things, and make that to be fit, which is in itself unfit; or make that necessary, which is in itself unnecessary; it can only be a transcript of the religion of nature; and so every thing it says, is to be judged of by the reason, and nature of things; otherwise, say they, we might be obliged to admit things, which, for ought we know, are as necessarily false, as God is true; since "all doctrines inconsistent with morality, are," as the Doctor justly observes, "as certainly, and necessarily false, as God is true."

Besides, if these moral obligations, which of themselves are incumbent on rational creatures, and which likewise shew themselves from their internal excellency, to be the will of God; are as evident, as the sun is bright; how can men, say the deists, believe on lesser evidence, what they know before to be certain on the

greateſt? In this caſe, muſt not faith be ſwallowed up by knowledge; and probability by demonſtration?

Theſe deiſts intirely agree with the Doctor, when he aſſerts, that "ſome doctrines are in their own nature neceſſarily, and demonſtrably true; ſuch as are all thoſe which concern the obligation of plain moral precepts; and theſe neither need, nor can receive any ſtronger proof from miracles, than what they have already, (though not, perhaps, ſo clearly indeed to all capacities;) from the evidence of right reaſon. Other doctrines are in their own nature neceſſarily falſe, and impoſſible to be true; ſuch as are all abſurdities and contradictions, and all doctrines that tend to promote vice; and theſe can never receive any degree of proof from all the miracles in the world." But as to what the Doctor adds, "that other doctrines are in their own nature indifferent, or poſſible, or, perhaps, probable to be true; and thoſe could not have been known to be poſitively true, but by the evidence of miracles, which prove them to be certain;" here theſe deiſts beg leave to differ with him, as to any doctrines, in their own nature indifferent, being the will of God; for that would be to ſuppoſe, what the Doctor has proved to be impoſſible, that God acts arbitrarily, and out of mere willfulneſs. And here they would aſk him, ſince, as he owns, "Evil ſpirits can do miracles, and the nature of the doctrine to be proved to be divine, muſt be taken into conſideration;" how the miracles can prove a doctrine, relating to indifferent things, to be from God? Or, how there can be any ſuch doctrines in the chriſtian religion, if what he ſays be true; "That every one of the doctrines it teaches, as matter of truth, has a natural tendency, and a direct powerful influence to reform the lives of men, and correct their manners." "This," adds he, "is the great end and ultimate deſign of all true religion: And it is a great and fatal miſtake to think that any doctrine, or any belief whatever, can be any otherwiſe of any benefit to men, than as it is fitted to promote this main end."

This ſuppoſes men, by their reaſon, are not only able to know, that it is repugnant to the nature of God, to require any thing of them, except it has a natural tendency, and a direct powerful influence to reform their lives, or correct their manners; but likewiſe to diſcern what doctrines have this tendency: And that, if, upon examination, they find every doctrine contained in ſcripture has this tendency, they may, then, ſafely pronounce them all to be divine. This previous examination, therefore, is highly neceſſary to prevent what he calls a fatal miſtake.

The difference between thoſe, who would engroſs the name of chriſtians to themſelves, and theſe chriſtian deiſts, as I may juſtly call them; is, that the former dare not examine into the truth of ſcripture-doctrines, leſt they ſhould ſeem to queſtion the veracity of the ſcriptures: Whereas the latter, who believe not the doctrines, becauſe contained in ſcripture; but the ſcripture, on account of the doctrines; are under no ſuch apprehenſion: For having critically examined thoſe doctrines by that reaſon, which God has given them to diſtinguiſh religion from ſuperſtition; they are ſure not to run into any errors of moment; notwithſtanding the confeſſed obſcurity of the ſcriptures, and thoſe many miſtakes that have crept into the text, whether by accident, or deſign.

The doctor ſays, "The moral part of our ſaviour's doctrine would have appeared infallibly true, whether he had ever worked miracles, or no. The reſt of his doctrines was what evidently tended to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs amongſt men. Therefore that part alſo of his doctrine was poſſible, and very probable to be true; but yet it could not from thence be known to be certainly true; nor ought to have been received as a revelation from God, unleſs it had been proved by undeniable miracles."

Here the deiſts can, by no means, come into the doctor's diſtinction, between the moral part of our ſaviour's doctrine, and that part which evidently tends to

promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs; it being manifeſtly a diſtinction without any difference: and if the whole of religion conſiſts in the honor of God, and the good of man, which he is far from denying; nothing can more effectually ſtrike at the certainty of all religion, than the ſuppoſing, that mankind could not be certain, that whatever evidently tended to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs, was the will of God, till they were convinced of it by undeniable miracles.

It is poſſible, ſay they, a man may doubt, whether there is a God; but none ſure, who believe one, can doubt, but that it is demonſtrably fit, juſt, and reaſonable for men, to do every thing that evidently tends to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs. And, if the mind of man," as the doctor ſays, "cannot avoid giving its aſſent to the eternal law of righteouſneſs;" can the mind of man avoid aſſenting to the practice of righteouſneſs as his indiſpenſable duty? But if it be but probable, that whatever evidently tends to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs, is from God; it cannot be probable, that miracles done in their behalf are from God. Does not the doctor here deſtroy the certainty of theſe doctrines, which he had before demonſtrated; and this too only to prove their probability?

Theſe chriſtian deiſts own the doctor is in the right, for contending, that the neceſſary relation that is between things, makes ſome actions moral, and others immoral; but when they would aſk, whether there be any other way to diſtinguiſh them, but from their nature and tendency; for they cannot but conclude, that thoſe which evidently tend to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs, are plain and moral duties, and perpetually oblige. And,

"If no miracles," as the doctor owns, "can prove a doctrine that is vicious in its tendency and conſequences, to be from God; muſt not, ſay they, that doctrine, which has the contrary tendency and conſequen-

ces, be from God; though ever ſo many miracles are done in oppoſition to it? And,

They likewiſe ſay, as evidently as God is not only a good and perfect, but alſo the only perfect being; ſo evident is it, that every doctrine, that carries any degree, much more the higheſt degree of goodneſs and perfection in it, has the character of divinity impreſſed on it; and therefore cannot agree with the doctor, "that neither can any degree of goodneſs, and excellency in the doctrine itſelf, make it certain, but only highly probable to come from God."

If no miracles can prove any different thing to be the will of God; and all that evidently tends to promote the honor of God, and the practice of righteouſneſs, are plain, moral duties, as the doctor contends; and all ſuch duties neither need, nor can receive any ſtronger proof from miracles, than what they have already from the evidence of right reaſon: how can miracles, ſay theſe deiſts, have any other uſe, than to make men conſider the nature, and tendency of a doctrine; and judge from thence whether it be from God? But,

Allowing the doctor what hypotheſis he pleaſes, in relation to miracles; yet if the doctrines themſelves, from their internal excellency, do not give us a certain proof of the will of God, no traditional miracles can do it; becauſe one probability added to another will not amount to certainty.

B. I thought the doctor had built his arguments in favor of revelation, upon the obſcurity of the law of nature; and would not have declared, that "the reaſon of all men, every where, as naturally aſſents to it, as all animals conſpire in the pulſe and motion of their heart and arteries; or as all men agree in their judgment concerning the whiteneſs of ſnow, or the brightneſs of the ſun.

A. Have patience, and you ſhall ſee, that ſnow is no longer white, or the ſun bright; and in order to it, I'll ſhew you, that the doctor's new ſcheme conſiſts in ſuppoſing, that though "in the original uncorrupted ſtate

of human nature, right reaſon may juſtly be ſuppoſed to have been a ſufficient guide; and a principle powerful enough to have preſerved men in the conſtant practice of their duty: yet upon the fall, mankind were in a very bad ſtate; as wanting greater help, and aſſiſtance, than the light of nature could afford them. And that there was plainly wanting ſome extraordinary, and ſuper-natural aſſiſtance, that was above the reach of philoſophy to procure. There was plainly wanting a divine revelation to recover mankind out of their univerſally degenerate ſtate, into a ſtate ſuitable to the original dignity of their nature." And again, "there was plainly wanting a divine revelation, to recover mankind out of their univerſal corruption and degeneracy." And in the the margin, "a divine revelation abſolute neceſſary for the recovery of mankind." But if a divine revelation was abſolutely neceſſary to this end, men were under an abſolute impoſſibility of recovering without it.

This is ſuppoſing, God has left all mankind for four thouſand years together, and even the greateſt part to this day, deſtitute of ſufficient means to do their duty, and to preſerve themſelves from ſinking into a corrupted and degenerate ſtate; and that it was impoſſible for them when thus ſunk, to recover themſelves; and yet that God (their duty being the ſame after, as before the fall,) expected impoſſibilities from them; viz. either to preſerve themſelves from thus falling; or if fallen, to recover themſelves. But if they had power to do this, and it was not their fault, that they at firſt were in, and after remained in what he calls a ſtate of univerſal degeneracy and corruption; this muſt then be the ſtate God deſigned they ſhould be in: and it would ſeem not only to be in vain, but a crime in them, to endeavor to change that ſtate, in which, God, of his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, thought fit to place them. But,

If men alike, at all times, owe their exiſtence to God, they at all times muſt be created in a ſtate of innocence, capable of knowing, and doing all God requires of them; and we muſt conclude from the wiſdom

and goodneſs of God, that he will, at no time, command any thing not fit for him to command, or for man to do: and therefore, could we ſuppoſe ſome things commanded by external revelation, which were not commanded by the light of nature; we muſt conclude, that till then it was not fit for God to command them, or for man uncommanded to do them.

The doctor, to ſhew the fault was not in mankind, but in the guide God gave them; ſays, "the light of nature, and right reaſon, was altogether inſufficient to reſtore true piety:" and as though this was not enough, he adds, "that the light of nature no where appeared." Which ſentences ſeem inconſiſtent, ſince the firſt ſuppoſes a light, though inſufficient, appearing to the minds of men; but the doctor does not ſeem to know whether they had no light at all; or "a light, which, he ſays, has undeniable defects in it."

B. May not the law of nature be very clear, though the light of nature may be ſo very dim, as to have undeniable defects?

A. Can the law of nature be clear, and the light of nature dim; when the law of nature is nothing, but what the light of nature, or reaſon dictates? Or, as Dr. Scott expreſſes it, "right reaſon pronouncing ſuch actions good, and ſuch evil, is the law of nature; and thoſe eternal reaſons, upon which it ſo pronounces, them, are the creed of nature; both which together make natural religion."

The doctor to purſue this point, and to ſhew that the fault was not in the creatures, but the creator; ſays, that "even thoſe few extraordinary men of the philoſophers, who did ſincerely endeavor to reform mankind, were themſelves intirely ignorant of ſome doctrines, abſolutely neceſſary for bringing about this great end of the reformation, and recovery of mankind:——Their whole attempt to diſcover the truth of things, and to inſtruct others therein, was like wandering in the wide ſea, without knowing whether to go, or which way to take, or having any guide to conduct them?"

And that you might be ſure, that the fault was in the eternal, univerſal, and unchangable law of nature; he calls thoſe philoſophers, who thus wandered in the wide ſea, "wiſe, brave, and good men, who made it their buſineſs to ſtudy, and practice the duties of natural religion themſelves, and to teach and exhort others to do the like;" nay, one would imagine he thought them, notwithſtanding their unavoidable ignorance, inſpired; ſince he ſays, "there never was a great man, but who was inſpired; *nemo unquam magnus vir ſine divino afflatu fuit*:" And for this he quotes the authority of Cicero, who, if the doctor's reaſoning is juſt, was certainly inſpired.

The doctor's ſcheme outdoes that of the moſt rigid predeſtinarians; for that at all times ſaves the elect: But here are no elect; but all, for many ages, are inextricably involved in a moſt depraved, corrupted, and impious ſtate.

The doctor juſtly ſays, "let none on pretence of maintaining natural religion, revile and and blaſpheme the chriſtian; leſt they be found liars unto God:" and for the ſame reaſon, may not I ſay, let none blaſpheme natural religion? Though if natural and revealed religion can differ, it muſt be a greater crime to revile a religion, that is eternal, univerſal, and unchangeable; than a religion that is not ſo. And,

Though I pay a due deference to the doctor's deep penetration in matters of religion, I dare not ſay there is the leaſt difference between the law of nature and the goſpel; for that would ſuppoſe ſome defect in one of them, and reflect on the author of both; who, certainly, was equally good, and equally wiſe, when he gave the one, as when he gave the other (if it may be called another) law. Nor dare I be ſo raſh, as to charge the light of nature with undeniable defects, as the doctor preſumes to do; ſince, if that light was ſufficient to anſwer the end deſigned by God, which was to be a competent guide to men, in relation to their preſent and future happineſs; there could be no deficiency: if not, then there muſt have been an undeniable default in the

giver of it, in appointing means not ſufficient to anſwer their deſigned ends; though both means and ends were entirely in his power. Nor dare I ſay, "there are ſeveral neceſſary truths, not poſſible to be diſcovered with any certainty by the light of nature:" becauſe God's means of information will, and muſt always bear an exact proportion to the neceſſity of our knowing what we are obliged to know; eſpecially touching the nature and attributes of God; which, he ſuppoſes, "were very difficult for the wiſeſt men to find out; and more difficult for them to explain." But here I muſt do the doctor that juſtice, as to obſerve, that he, in another place, is ſo far from finding any ſuch defect in this light, even with relation to the nature and attributes of God; that he ſays, "All the heathen world had certain means of knowing God; for, that which may be known of God, was manifeſt enough unto men in all ages;" And if no age can know more of God, than that which may be known; and if that which may be known of him was manifeſt in all ages; what advantage can one age in this grand point have above another? And, therefore, I muſt conclude,

It cannot be imputed to any defect in the light of nathat the pagan world ran into idolatry; but to their being entirely governed by prieſts, who pretended communication with their Gods; and to have thence their revelations, which they impoſed on the credulous as divine oracles: Whereas the buſineſs of the Chriſtian diſpenſation was to deſtroy all thoſe traditional revelations; and reſtore, free from all idolatry, the true primitive, and natural religion, implanted in mankind from the creation.

The doctor, however, ſeems afraid, leſt he had allowed too much to the light of nature, in relation to the diſcovery of our duty both to God and man; and not left room for revelation to make any addition: he therefore, ſuppoſes, "there are ſome duties, which nature hints at only in general;" but, if we cannot, without highly reflecting on the wiſdom and goodneſs of God,

ſuppoſe, that he has not, at all times given the whole rational creation a plain rule for their conduct, in relation to thoſe duties they owe to God, themſelves, and one another; muſt we not ſuppoſe reaſon and religion (that rule of all other rules) inſeparable; ſo that no rational creature can be ignorant of it, who attends to the dictate of his own mind; I mean, as far as it is neceſſary for him to know it? An ignorant peaſant may know what is ſufficient for him, without knowing as much as the learned rector of St. James's.

Though the Doctor ſays, "the knowledge of the law of nature is in fact, by no means, univerſal;" yet he aſſerts, that "Man is plainly in his own nature an accountable creature;" which ſuppoſes the light of nature plainly, and undeniably teaches him that law, for breach of which he is naturally accountable; and did not the doctor believe this law to be univerſal, he could not infer a future judgment from the conſcience all men have of their actions, or the judgment they paſs on them in their own minds; whereby "They that have not any law, are a law unto themſelves; their conſciences bearing witneſs, and their thoughts accuſing, or excuſing one another." Which is ſuppoſing but one law, whether that law be written on paper, or in the hearts of men only; and that all men, by the judgment they paſs on their own actions, are conſcious of this law. And,

The apoſtle Paul, though quoted by the doctor, is ſo far from favoring his hypotheſis of any invincible ignorance, even in the wiſeſt, and beſt of the philoſophers; that he, by ſaying, the Gentiles that have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law;* makes the law of nature and grace to be the ſame: and ſuppoſes the reaſon why they were to be puniſhed, was their ſinning againſt light and knowledge: That which may be known of God was manifeſt in them, and when they knew God, they glorified him not as God:† And they were likewiſe guilty of abominable corruptions, not ignorantly,

* Rom. ii. 14. † i. 19. 21 32. ver. 32.

but knowing the judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death. Had the doctor but considered this self evident propoſition, that there can be no tranſgreſſion where there is no law; and that an unkonwn law is the ſame as no law; and conſequently, that all mankind, at all times, muſt be capable of knowing all (whether more or leſs) that God requires: it would have prevented his endeavoring to prove, that till the Goſpel diſpenſation, mankind were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of their duty in ſeveral important points and thus charging the light of nature with undeniable defects.

I think it is no compliment to external revelation, though the doctor deſigned it as the higheſt; to ſay, it prevailed, when the light of nature was, as he ſuppoſes, in a manner extinct; ſince then an irrational religion might as eaſily obtain, as a rational one.

The Doctor, to prove that revelation has ſupplied the inſufficiency, and undeniable defects of the light of nature, refers us to Phil. iv. 8. which he introduces after this pompous manner;" let any man of an honeſt and ſincere mind conſider, whether that practical doctrine has not, even in itſelf, the greateſt marks of divine original, wherein whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be anything praiſeworthy; all theſe and theſe only, are the things earneſtly recommended to men's practice."

I would aſk the Doctor how he can know what theſe things are, which are thus only earneſtly recommended to mens practice; or ,why they have, in themſelves, the greateſt mark of a divine original; but from the light of nature? nay, how can the doctor know, there are defects in the light of nature, but from the light itſelf? which ſuppoſes this light is all we have to truſt to; and conſequently, all the Doctor has been doing, on pretence of promoting the honour

of revelation, is introducing univerſal ſcepticiſm: and I am concerned, and grieved to ſee a man, who had ſo great a ſhare of the light of nature, employing it to expoſe that light, of which before he had given the higheſt commendation; and which can have no other effect, than to weaken even his own demonſtration, drawn from that light, for the being of a God.

I ſhall mention but one text more, which, had not the doctor thought it highly to his purpoſe, for ſhewing the inſufficiency of the light of nature, he would not have uſhered it in after this ſolemn manner: "When men have put themſelves into this temper and frame of mind, let them try if they can any longer reject the evidence of the goſpel: If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the doctrine; whether it be of God."*

Is it not ſtrange, to ſee ſo judicious a divine write after ſuch a manner, as if he thought the beſt way to ſupport the dignity of revelation, was to derogate from the immutable, and eternal law of nature? and while he is depreſſing it, extol revelation for thoſe very things it borrows from that law? in which, though he aſſerts there are undeniable defects, yet he owns, that God governs all his own actions by it, and expects that all men ſhould ſo govern their's. But,

I find the doctor's own brother, the dean of Sarum, is intirely of my mind, as to thoſe two texts the doctor quotes; viz. Rom. ii. 14. and Phil. iv. 8. As to the firſt, Rom. ii. 14. he ſays, "The apoſtle ſuppoſes, that the moral law is founded in the nature and reaſon of things; that every man is endued with ſuch powers and faculties of mind, as render him capable of ſeeing, and taking notice of this law: and alſo with ſuch a ſenſe and judgment of the reaſonableneſs, and fitneſs of conforming his actions to it, that he cannot but in his own mind acquit himſelf when he does ſo; and condemn himſelf when he does otherwiſe." And as to

* John vii. 17.

the ſecond. viz. Phil. iv. 8. where the ſame apoſtle recommends the practice of virtue, upon the forementioned principles of comelineſs and reputation: "Theſe principles," ſays he, "if duly attended to, were ſufficient to inſtruct men in the whole of their duty towards themſelves, and towards each other; and they would alſo have taught them their duty towards God, their creator and governor, if they had diligently purſued them: For according as the apoſtle expreſſes it, Rom. i. 20. The inviſible things of God from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.——The ſame fitneſs and decency that appears in the regular behavior of men towards each other, appears alſo in their behavior towards God: And this, likewiſe, is founded in the nature and reaſon of things; and is what the circumſtances and condition they are in, do abſolutely require. Thus we ſee wherein moral virtue, or good conſiſts, and what the obligation to it is, from its own native beauty and excellency."

B. If God, as the doctor aſſerts, does abhor all arbitrary commands, and natural religion comprehends every thing that is not arbitrary; and withal, is ſo deeply impreſſed on the minds of men, that they cannot violate its precepts without ſelf-condemnation: I cannot apprehend how theſe philoſophers, who made it their buſineſs to ſtudy, and practice natural religion, could be intirely ignorant of any doctrines abſolutely neceſſary for the reformation of mankind: Nay, that "the whole attempt to diſcover the truth of things, was like wandering in the wide ſea, without any guide:" and therefore, I ſhould be glad to know, what are theſe abſolutely neceſſary doctrines, they were thus intirely ignorant of.

A. "Theſe philoſophers," the doctor ſays, "had no knowledge of the whole ſcheme, order, and ſtate of things." This, I think, may be allowed; ſince I believe there is none at preſent, who have, or pretend

to have ſo extenſive a knowledge. "But they had no knowledge of the method of God's governing the world." Then they muſt be blind; if living in the world, they did not ſee how the things of this world were governed by Providence. "Then they did not know the ground and circumſtances of the preſent corrupt condition of men." If ſo, they did not underſtand human nature, and how prejudices and paſſions work on mankind. "They did not know," ſays he, "the manner of the divine interpoſition neceſſary for their recovery, and the glorious end, to which God intended finally to conduct them." It muſt be owned, they were not in the leaſt acquainted with the doctor's glorious ſcheme, of all mankind's being for four thouſand years together, and the greateſt part too, at preſent, by the very frame of their conſtitution, and the condition of their being, placed by God in a moſt depraved, degenerate ſtate; without poſſibility of recovering from it. "But they had, it ſeems, no knowledge of the deſign of God in creating mankind." Sure the doctor had forgot what he quotes from Cicero to this purpoſe; "*ad tuendos conſervandoſque homines hominem natum eſſe. Homines hominum cauſa ſunt generati, ut ipſi inter ſe alii aliis prodeſſe poſſint. Hominem, naturæ obedientem, homini nocere non poſſe.*" And does not the doctor maintain the ſame thing, in ſaying, that "God could have no motive to create things at firſt, but only that he might communicate to them his goodneſs and happineſs."

"Theſe philoſophers, he ſays, were ignorant of the original dignity of human nature," and becauſe he frequently inſiſts on it, I ſhall fully conſider this matter; and will confeſs, it is probable, they thought that human nature, men, at all times, having the ſame common faculties, was always the ſame. Had they known the ſacred ſtory of Adam and Eve, that would have confirmed them in their ſentiments. The moſt they could perceive by it would be, that the firſt pair came into the world in every ſenſe naked, deſtitute of all that knowledge, experience gave their poſterity; and therefore,

God, the better to ſupport them in this ſtate of univerſal ignorance, planted a garden for them; that they might live on the fruit of it: how weak was their reaſon, how ſtrong their appetites! when they could not abſtain (the ſole command given them) from the fruit of but one tree; in a garden too, where muſt needs be an infinite variety, and the choiceſt fruit!

Theſe philoſophers would have been at a loſs to conceive, how Eve could entertain a conference with a ſerpent (incapable of human voice) even before conſent had given any meaning to ſounds. And they would be apt to aſk, why, though cuſtom had made it ſhameful to go without clothes in thoſe places where clothes are worn; the firſt pair ſhould nevertheleſs, though they knew not what clothes were, be aſhamed to be ſeen unclothed by one another, and by God himſelf? ſo that, when they heard the voice of God walking in the Garden, in the cool of the evening, (a ſtrange repreſentation theſe philoſophers would think of God!) they hid themſelves from his preſence: Nay, God himſelf, their fig-leave aprons, which they, (having, it ſeems, all things neceſſary for ſewing) ſewed together, not being ſufficient to hide their ſhame, make them coats of the ſkins of beaſts, newly created in pairs. And they would, likewiſe, deſire to be informed, how Eve, before her eyes were opened, ſaw that the tree was good for food; and that it was pleaſant to the eye, and a tree to be deſired to make one wiſe.*

Upon the whole, I grant, that theſe philoſophers would be ſo far from finding out this original dignity in the firſt pair, that they would be apt to think, by the ſerpent's ſo eaſily impoſing on her, that the original ſerpentine nature, was too ſubtle for the original human nature; and that there being nothing done by any ſerpent ſince the fall, which could occaſion the precepts of men's being bid to be as wiſe as ſerpents, it muſt allude

* Gen. iii. 8. 6.

to this tranſaction between the woman and the ſerpent; though they could never come into the belief of the ophitæ, (with whom the marcionites may be joined) who thought, that wiſdom herſelf was the ſerpent, which they preferred to Chriſt, as teaching them to know good and evil; and deſigning for them immortality and deity; and foretelling that Adam, though threatened with certain death on the day he eat the forbidden fruit, ſhould not then die; who accordingly lived after that ſentence about 900 years: And that Moſes erecting the brazen, healing ſerpent, was in honor of this ſerpent; who deſigned ſo much good to mankind.

B. Theſe philoſophers, would be groſsly miſtaken, did they believe this done by a ſerpent: We ſay, it was the devil, in the ſhape of a ſerpent, that tempted them.

A. Theſe philoſophers, indeed, would ſee, that the chriſtians are now aſhamed of the literal interpretation of this ſtory; though St. Paul was of another mind, who expreſsly ſays, the ſerpent deceived eve through ſubtlety. And they, perhaps, would aſk, whether it was the devil, who is ſaid to be more ſubtle than any beaſt of of the field; ſince it was this ſubtle beaſt that ſaid to the woman, ye ſhall not ſurely die. And it was upon the woman's ſaying, the ſerpent beguiled me, and I did eat; that the Lord ſaid to the ſerpent, becauſe thou haſt done this, thou art curſed above all the cattle, and above every beaſt of the field; Upon thy belly ſhalt thou go, and the duſt thou ſhalt eat all the days of thy life.* Does this character agree to an immaterial, immortal being? Did he all the days of his life go upon his belly, and eat duſt? Does not God, continuing his diſcourſe to the ſerpent, ſay, I will put enmity between thee and the woman; between thy ſeed, and her ſeed; it ſhall bruiſe thy head, and thou ſhalt bruiſe his heels. And is not this the conſequence of ſerpents going on their belly? Do they not frequently bite men by the heel; eſpecially in hot countries, where ſerpents are numerous, and men's

* Gen. iii. 4. 3. 13. 14.

heels bare? Why ſhall thy ſeed, not ſignify thy ſeed; but the ſeed of a being not mentioned in all this ſtory; and who has no ſeed, but metaphorical ſeed: which, ſince the woman's ſeed is taken literally, would be immediately changing the meaning of the word ſeed? Does this text afford the leaſt argument, to imagine God did not as much ſpeak to the ſerpent, as to Adam and Eve? If a book is to be interpreted thus, eſpecially in relation to hiſtorical facts; how can we, theſe philoſophers would ſay, be ſure of its meaning in any one place? Beſides, would they not aſk, why the whole race of ſerpents ſhould be curſed for the crime of a fallen angel?

B. They might as well aſk, why all other animals ſhould bring forth in pain, for the fault of Eve? For had nature formed all females at firſt, as they have been ever ſince Eve eat the forbidden fruit, none of them, except by miracles, could be delivered without pain; no more than ſerpents, had they at firſt been formed, as at preſent, creep otherwiſe than they do.

A. Thoſe philoſophers, perhaps, would not think the matter a jot mended, by ſubſtituting (did the ſtory afford room for it) a devil, inſtead of a ſerpent; ſince they could not ſee, how an infinitely good God could permit a moſt malicious cunning ſpirit to work on the weakneſs of a woman, juſt placed in a new world; without interpoſing in this unequal conflict, or giving notice of any ſuch wicked ſpirit; Angels, neither good, or bad, being mentioned in the hiſtory of the creation: and yet after the fact was committed, God ſhould thus revenge it on all their innocent poſterity forever; by curſing the ground, &c.

What would ſeem to them moſt unaccountable, is, that God, ſhould continue to ſuffer this ſubtle, and malignant ſpirit, endowed with an univerſal knowledge of what is paſt, and a deep penetration into futurity; to range about, deceiving, and circumventing mankind; who, having a capacity vaſtly ſuperior to them, is continually ſowing the ſeeds of miſchief, and ſcattering the

poiſon of univerſal diſcord; making uſe of thoſe very men as his inſtruments, whoſe profeſſed buſineſs it is, to promote univerſal concord.

The poor Indians, you know, when our miſſionaries give ſuch an account of the devil, ſay, "Is not your God a good God, and loves all mankind? Why does he then permit this devil, to be continually doing them ſuch infinite hurt? Why is he not put under confinement, if not deprived of a being, of which he has made himſelf unworthy? With us, one, who does not hinder a miſchief, when it is in his power, is thought not much better than he who does it."

But to return to the doctor: Where is the difference in relation to the goodneſs of God, and the happineſs of mankind, between God's creating them in a ſtate, as he calls it, of univerſal degeneracy and corruption; or cauſing them by the folly of Adam, which infinite wiſdom could not but foreſee, to fall unavoidably into this bad ſtate; what dignity, what perfection could Adam's nature have, that the nature of his poſterity has not? Are they not as much framed after the image of their maker? Are not their ſouls as much immediately from God as Adam's? And are not their bodies exactly made after the ſame manner? Were not all other animals at firſt created by God as well as men? Had theſe any dignity, or perfection in their animal nature, which the ſame creatures ſince have not? Beſides, is not this ſuppoſed high ſtate of perfection in Adam, giving the lye to the hiſtory? ſince this very perfect man, notwithſtanding all the original dignity of his nature, had no better excuſe for his yielding to the firſt temptation, than that the woman, whom thou gaveſt to be with me, gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

How can we ſuppoſe his underſtanding was in the leaſt impaired by this crime, ſince God himſelf ſays (though to whom, it does not appear) behold, the man is become like one of us, to know good and evil,* and

* Gen. iii. 12. iii. 22.

to prevent his being ſo, both for immortality as well as knowledge, God placed cherubims with a flaming ſword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.* Would it not be very ſtrange, that his poſterity (while his underſtanding received no hurt) ſhould ſuffer ſo greatly in theirs, as the doctor would have it thought? Indeed, St. Auſtin ſuppoſes, that Adam before the fall could have erected his *membrum genitale ad voluntatis nutum*; and that motions of the fleſh were perfectly ſubordinate to his will, like his fingers. But this notion not being orthodox at preſent, and the loſs of this faculty no ways infers the loſs of underſtanding; I may venture to ſay, that the doctor's deſcription of human nature in all but one pair (and that too, perhaps, but for a day) is a libel on the dignity of human nature, and an high reflection on the wiſdom and goodneſs of its author; in placing them, without any fault of theirs, in an unavoidable ſtate of degeneracy and corruption for four thouſand years together; and continuing the greateſt part ſtill in the ſame ſta[illegible]

But let us ſee, whether the doctor has better ſucceſs with his other arguments, by which he endeavors to curtail the univerſal goodneſs of God; and therefore, I ſhall take notice of two other things, which he inſiſts on, to ſhew the groſs, and unavoidable ignorance of the philoſophers, in the moſt momentous points of religion: the firſt is—that which of all things the beſt, and wiſeſt of the philoſophers were entirely, and unavoidably ignorant of; and yet was of the greateſt importance for ſinful men to know; viz. the method by which ſuch as have erred from the right way, and have offended God, may yet reſtore themſelves to his favor." And here he concludes, that there ariſes from nature no ſufficient comfort to ſinners, but an anxious and endleſs ſolicitude, about the means of appeaſing the deity."

To anſwer the doctor I need only to quote another able divine writing on the ſame ſubject of natural and

* Gen. v. 24.

revealed religion, ſay, " I affirm it as an article of natural religion, that forgiveneſs does certainly follow repentance. If God be a merciful and benign being, he will accept the payment we will be able to make; and not inſiſt on impoſſible demands, with his frail, bankrupt creatures. No generous man, but will forgive his enemy, much more his child; if he diſapproves the wrong he has done, is really grieved for it, is deſirous to make amends, even by ſuffering for the honor of the perſon injured: How much more ſhall God forgive all perſons thus diſpoſed, and reformed; ſince there is no generoſity in man, but what is, with his nature, infuſed into him by God?

" Not only mercy, but wiſdom will effectually diſpoſe to God to forgive the penitent, becauſe the creature reformed by penitence is ſuch as it ought to be, and ſuch as God willeth it; which being ſo, it can be no wiſdom in God to afflict it unneceſſarily. It is not juſtice, but rage, to puniſh where the perſon is already mended. When we argue thus, from any of the known, and certain attributes of God, we are as ſure of the concluſion, as if the thing was to be diſcerned by ſenſe; ſince no ſenſible thing is more certain than the attributes of God."

Mr. Locke has the ſame ſentiments, and ſays, " God had, by the light of reaſon, revealed to all mankind, who would make uſe of that light, that he was good, and merciful. The ſame ſpark of the divine nature, and knowledge in man, which making him a man, ſhewed him the law he was under as a man; ſhewed him alſo the way of atoning the merciful, kind, compaſſionate author, and father of him, and his being, when he had tranſgreſſed the law. He that made uſe of this candle of the Lord, ſo far as to find what was his duty; could not miſs to find alſo the way of reconciliation and forgiveneſs, when he had failed of his duty.——

" The law is the eternal, immutable ſtandard of right. And a part of that law is, that a man ſhould forgive, not only his children, but his enemies, upon their re-

pentance, aſking pardon, and amendment. And therefore, he could not [illegible] of the author of this law, and God of patience and conſolation, who is rich in mercy, would forgive his frail off-ſpring; if they acknowledged their faults, diſapproved the iniquity of their tranſgreſſions, begged his pardon, and reſolved in earneſt for the future, to conform their actions to this rule, which they owned to be juſt and right. This way of reconciliation, this hope of atonement, the light of nature revealed to them."

Had the doctor only ſaid, that we cannot know from the light of nature, that There is more joy in Heaven over one ſinner that repents, than over ninety and nine juſt perſons, who need no repentance; that, if ſtrictly taken, might, perhaps, be better diſputed; but nothing, ſure, can be more ſhocking than to ſuppoſe the unchangeable God, whoſe nature, and property is ever to forgive, was not, at all times, equally willing to pardon repenting ſinners; and equally willing they ſhould have the ſatisfaction of knowing it.

If God's ways are equal, and he has, at one time as well as another, the ſame goodneſs for the ſons of men, in relation to their eternal happineſs; how can we ſuppoſe he left all mankind, for ſo many ages, and the greateſt part of, even at preſent, in a moſt miſerable ſtate of doubt, and uncertainty, about the pardon of ſin; and conſequently, about the poſſibility of any man's being ſaved? If this notion, that even the beſt, and wiſeſt of mankind, were, not only abſolutely, but moſt abſolutely ignorant of that, which of all things, it was of the greateſt importance for mankind to know, be not inconſiſtent with the divine goodneſs; I am at a loſs to know what is ſo.

If the deſign of God, in communicating any thing of himſelf to men, was their happineſs; would not that deſign have obliged him, who, at all times, alike deſires their happineſs, to have, at all times, alike communicated it to them? If God always acts for the good of his creatures, what reaſon can be aſſigned, why he

ſhould not, from the beginning, have diſcovered ſuch things, as make for their good; but defer the doing of it till the time of Tiberious? ſince the ſooner this was done, the greater would his goodneſs appear to be: Nay, is it conſiſtent with infinite benevolence, to hide that for many ages, which he knew, was as uſual at firſt to prevent, as afterwards it could be, to put a ſtop to any thing he diſliked?

And, indeed, without denying that God, at all times, intended mankind that happineſs, their nature is capable of, we muſt allow, that, at all times, he has given them the means of obtaining it, by the rules he has preſcribed them for their conduct; and conſequently, theſe rules muſt have been diſcoverable at all times. For, if God acts upon rational motives, muſt not the ſame motives which obliged him to diſcover any thing that is for the good of mankind, have obliged them to diſcover every thing that is ſo; and that too, after the ſame plain manner? And not do this, as it were, grudgingly, little by little; here a bit, and there a bit; and that to one favorite nation only, under the veil of types, allegories, &c. And at laſt, though he diſcovered ſome things more plainly, yet it was but to a ſmall part of mankind, the bulk of themto this day remaining in deplorable ignorance.

B. Another argument the doctor brings for the undeniable defect of the light of nature is, that though it is evident from this light, that God ought to be worſhiped, yet "the manner, in which he might be acceptably worſhipped, the wiſeſt and beſt of the philoſophers were intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of."

A. Who can forbear pitying theſe unhappy philoſophers, indiſpenſably obliged to worſhip God acceptably; and yet, hard fate! unavoidably ignorant how to perform this acceptable worſhip? But,

If God could not will to be worſhiped, without willing ſome way, or other, of being worſhiped; and if he left it to the light of nature to diſcover how he would be worſhipped, could that be for any other reaſon, but

becauſe it was acceptable to him, to be worſhipped as that light directed? Is it not a contradition, to ſuppoſe God would be acceptably worſhipped, and yet let men, even the beſt, be intirely and unavoidably ignorant, how to worſhip him acceptably? Does not the light of nature tell us, that God is a being of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs; and that all his natural faculties are directed by theſe two attributes, to ſerve the purpoſes of benevolence? How then can we be ignorant, what worſhip, what ſervice, we are to render him? Can we doubt, if we endeavor to have the ſame frame of mind, and govern our actions by the ſame law of benevolence; whether we ſhall obtain his favor? ſince to imitate him, is to pay him the higheſt adoration; and to keep his commandments, ſhews the higheſt veneration. It is for ſuch reaſons as theſe, that Dr. Scott intirely differs from this learned author, and ſays, "If we truly underſtand what God is, we cannot but apprehend what worſhip is ſuitable to him, from the eternal congruity and proportion, that there is between things and things, as obvious to the mind, as ſounds and colours are to the ears and eyes."

B. Mr. Clarke owns, that "obedience to the obligations of nature, and imitation of the moral attributes of God; the wiſeſt philoſophers eaſily knew, was, undoubtedly, the moſt acceptable ſervice to God;" and what he inſiſts upon as neceſſary, is only ſome external adoration.

A. But ſince external adoration cannot be performed, but by external ſigns, theſe muſt be different in different places; becauſe what are marks of reſpect in one country, are marks of diſreſpect in another; or, at leaſt, look ridiculous.

B. The reaſon that the doctor gives, why the wiſeſt men were intirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God would be acceptably worſhipped with external adoration, is, becauſe they fell lamentably into the practice of the moſt fooliſh idolatry.

A. Never any before, called the worſhipping of i-

dols, the worſhipping of the true God, though unacceptably. But however, ſince you lay ſuch ſtreſs on this diſcourſe, I ſhall conſider, what the doctor ſays, to prove this paradox.

"Plato," ſays he, "after having delivered almoſt divine truths, concerning the nature, and attributes, of the ſupreme God, weakly adviſes men to worſhip likewiſe inferior Gods; nor dare to condemn the worſhipping even of ſtatutes.———And ſo he ſpoiled the beſt philoſophy in the world, by adding idolatry to that worſhip, which he had wiſely, and bravely before proved to be due to the creator of all things." But could he be intirely, and unavoidably ignorant of what he has bravely, and wiſely proved?

"Socrates," he ſays, "ſuperſtitiouſly offered a cock to Eſculapius, unleſs it was done in mockery to him, looking on death to be his greateſt deliverance:" But ſince he doubted what Socrates intended, why does he inſtance in him, as one intirely, and unavoidably ignorant, how God was to be acceptably worſhipped?

"Cicero," he ſays, "allowed men to continue the idolatry of their anceſtors, adviſed them to conform themſelves to the ſuperſtitious religion of their country. ——In which he fondly contradicts himſelf, by inexcuſably complying with the practices of thoſe men, whom, in many of his writings, he largely, and excellently proves to be extremely fooliſh, upon the account of thoſe very practices." But does this prove any unavoidable ignorance in Cicero, in relation to the worſhip of the true God? But only that he, as a philoſopher, not only knew, but ſpoke the truth; though as a prieſt, he thought fit to diſſemble: Perhaps, he ſuppoſed it not prudent, without ſome ſuch, ſoftening expreſſions, ſo plainly to attack the reigning ſuperſtition. But.

Since the reaſoning of the ancient philoſophers fully ſhewed their ſenſe, theſe reflections might have been ſpared; were it but for the ſake of ſome modern philoſophers; whoſe philoſophical faith is as little reconcilable

with the creeds and litanies, they, as prieſts, ſolemnly repeat; and the articles they as ſolemnly ſubſcribe; as any thing Cicero, the prieſt, could ſay in oppoſition to Cicero, the philoſopher; who deſcribes our moral obligations after ſo beautiful a manner; and by ſuch plain, and irreſiſtable arguments, ſhews the neceſſary connexion between virtue and happineſs; vice and miſery; as cannot but make highly delighted with the one, and create in us a juſt averſion to the other.

The doctor had here a fair opportunity, of ſhewing the abſurdity of arguing from what even the beſt of men ſay; when it is not ſafe, to talk otherwiſe. This had been more agreeable to his candor, than taking a handle from hence to expoſe the light, and law of nature, as well as thoſe great men; to whom we are infinitely obliged, for writing under theſe diſadvantages ſo freely as they have done; eſpecially Cicero, from whom the fathers have borrowed their beſt arguments againſt paganiſm. Arnobius ſays, that if his works had been read, as they ought, by the heathens, there had been no need of chriſtian writers. And in anſwer to thoſe gentiles, who, ſeeing the uſe the chriſtians made of them, were for ſoliciting the ſenate to burn, or otherwiſe ſuppreſs them; he ſays, that were, not to defend the gods, but to fear the teſtimony of truth. Which pagan method has not only been uſed ever ſince, by all who feared the teſtimony of truth, to the loſs of an immenſe treaſure of learning; but they have improved it too, and been for burning of men, as well as books: and thereby introduced a ſuperſtition more abominable than paganiſm. And give me leave to add, that

In old Rome, as long as there was civil liberty, there was an entire liberty of conſcience; and even the prieſts of the national church, provided they comply with its ceremonies, had no ſpeculative creeds, or articles to ſubſcribe; but were intirely free to maintain what opinions they pleaſed. Of this, Cicero is a remarkable inſtance; who in his book *de divinatione*, expoſes the ſuperſtition of his own country-men and ridicules thoſe

miracles, with which the annals of the church prieſts were filled: and he, though a prieſt himſelf, every where treats his brethen with great freedom; and in his addreſs to them, ſpeaking of an ambitious, intriguing prieſt, who would hide his malice under the cover of religion (for ſome ſuch there have been in all religions) ſays, "If Publius Claudius is to defend his peſtilent, and deadly miniſtry by the ſacred name of divine religion, when it is impoſſible for him to do it by human equity: it is high time to look for other cerimonies, other miniſters of the immortal Gods, and other interpreters of religion." But to return,

The doctor having thus expoſed the light of nature, and, as he thinks, ſhewn its undeniable defects in the perſons of theſe philoſophers; demands what grounds our modern deiſts have to imagine, that if they themſelves had lived without the light of the goſpel, they ſhould have been wiſer than Plato, Socrates, and Cicero. But ſure no great wiſdom is required to know the law of nature, was it but half ſo plain, as the doctor, from biſhop Cumberland, has repreſented it; and which no well meaning gentiles, who did by nature the things contained in the law, could be ignorant of. And,

I am ſurprized to find the doctor arguing as if that law, "which is a moſt perfect rule to the moſt perfect being, is not perfect enough for his imperfect creatures;" though their whole perfection conſiſts in imitating him, and governing their actions by the ſame rule: a rule, which it cannot be denied, had mankind governed their actions by it, would have rendered them as perfect as their nature was capable of. I ſhould be glad to know, why this rule has loſt its virtue, and will not now render man as acceptable to God as ever? but could we ſuppoſe a God of infinite perfection, might ordain an imperfect or inſufficient rule, for the actions of his critures; or, which comes to the ſame, afford them another light for the diſcovery of it, but what had ſuch undeniable defects, as made them incapable of knowing their duty; nor was ſufficient to hinder them

from falling into, and continuing from age to age, and in a deplorable ſtate of corruption: I would aſk whether God did this knowingly, or ignorantly, not foreſeeing the conſequences? to ſuppoſe the firſt is to make God act out of ſpite, and hatred to his creatures, in bringing them into being, and making that being a curſe to them: or if the laſt, why were not theſe defects ſuplied as ſoon as diſcovered? or were they not diſcovered by infinite wiſdom till theſe latter times; and then revealed to a ſmall number, though all mankind had equal need of them? and then too, ſo imperfectly, that men have ever ſince been in continual quarrels, about the meaning of moſt of thoſe things which are ſuppoſed to have been added, to ſupply the defects of the law of nature?

What human legiſlator, if he found a defect in his laws, and thought it for the good of his ſubject to add new laws, would not promulgate them to all his people? or, what parent would act after ſo partial a manner, as the doctor, in a ſelf-confounding ſcheme, ſuppoſes the common parent of mankind has done? and not let all his children know as ſoon as poſſible, what was for their common good? eſpecially if they were in ſuch a forlorn, and miſerable condition, as he repreſents all mankind to have been in, almoſt as ſoon as created.

The doctor very rightly obſerves, that "even among men, their is no earthly father, but, in thoſe things he eſteems his own excellencies, deſires and expects to be imitated by the children; how much more ſays he, is it neceſſary, that God who is infinitely far from being ſubject to paſſions, and variableneſs, as frail men are; and has an infinitely tenderer, and heartier concern for the happineſs of his creatures, than mortal men can have for the welfare of their poſterity, muſt deſire to be imitated by his creatures in thoſe perfections, which are the foundation of his own unchangeable happineſs?" how far this invariableneſs of God, and his great love for his creatures, is conſiſtent with that ſcheme of things, which the doctor has hitherto advanced, has, I think, been made

appear. We will now examine what he adds, to ſhew that God has an infinitely more tender and hearty concern for the happineſs of his creatures, than mortal men can have for the welfare of their poſterity: what he ſays is, that "both the neceſſities of men, and their natural notions of God gave them reaſonable ground to expect and hope for a divine revelation, to recover mankind out of their univerſally degenerate eſtate, into one ſuitable to the original excellence of their nature." And that "it was agreeable to the dictates of nature, and right reaſon, to hope for ſuch a divine revelation; that it is agreeable to the natural hopes and expectations of men, that is, of right reaſon duly improved, to ſuppoſe God making ſome particular revelation of his will to mankind.—And that this was moſt ſuitable to the divine attributes." Yet notwithſtanding theſe, and a great many other fine ſayings to the ſame purpoſe, he denies that God was obliged to make ſuch a revelation: but, with ſubmiſſion, what other reaſon have we to ſay, God is obliged to do any one thing whatever; but that it is agreeable to the natural notions we have of his wiſdom and goodneſs, and to the dictates of nature and reaſon, for him ſo to do: and if the neceſſities of mankind have always been as great, and the goodneſs of God always the ſame; would not theſe oblige him to have preſcribed an immediate remedy to the diſeaſe, and not deferred it four thouſand years together; and then applied it but to a few, though all had equal need of it? And a need occaſioned (as the doctor ſuppoſes) by God himſelf, in not affording them any other light, but what was inſufficient to anſwer the end for which it was given.

B. The doctor ſuppoſes, that this revelation was not the effect of God's juſtice; for then it muſt needs have been given in all ages, and to all nations; but of mercy and condeſcending goodneſs.

A. Can a being be denominated merciful, and good, who is ſo only to a few; but cruel and unmerciful to the reſt? And certainly all the arguments the doctor

can urge from the neceſſities of mankind, and the abundant goodneſs of God, will equally prove, that this revelation, did it teach a new religion, ſhould be univerſal; as that it ſhould be at all. But,

If revelation was abſolutely neceſſary to recover mankind, out of their univerſal degenerate, and corrupted ſtate, and replace them in a ſtate ſuitable to the original dignity, and excellency of their nature; and more effectually to do this, there was inſtituted an order of men who were to be, as the doctor calls them, the inſtruments of conveying extraordinary aſſiſtances for this purpoſe; muſt not revelation have had its intended effect, and made Chriſtians, eſpecially where theſe inſtruments of conveying extraordinary aſſiſtances, are in great numbers, and in great authority; much more perfect and excellent, than men could poſſibly be in, when under times of unavoidable corruption? And yet,

The doctor having taken a large paſſage from Cicero, where the orator very rhetorically deſcribes the great corruptions of his time, and aſſigns the cauſes thereof; makes this remark, "that a livelier deſcription of the preſent corrupt ſtate of human nature is not eaſy to be met with:" which, I think, is ſufficiently owning, that human nature at preſent is far from being exalted to ſo high a ſtate of perfection, or in the leaſt mended. And the doctor frequently quotes Cicero for the ſupport of his opinion, yet Cicero is far from ſuppoſing any ſuch defect in nature; for a proof of which, I need only mention theſe two ſhort paſſages: "It is impoſſible to err, as long as we follow the guidance of nature.—There is no man, who following the conduct of nature, but may arrive at perfection." And the doctor himſelf quotes a paſſage from him, to ſhew that nature has not been wanting to declare her mind, *Multis ſignis natura declarat quid velit.* And it might be as eaſily ſhewn, he as much miſtakes the meaning of thoſe other philoſophers he quotes. And indeed, how could any men, except they had a very abſurd hypotheſis to ſerve, aſſert, that any

thing could be the duty of men, which they were unavoidably ignorant of? Yet,

The doctor, to prove this invincible ignorance in the Gentile world, has frequent recourse to the authority of Lanctantius, a primitive father, without shewing that he had a greater regard for truth than other fathers: And I am afraid the doctor himself seems here not much to regard it, in maiming a sentence of Lanctantius; *Maximum itaque argumentum est, philosophiam neque ad sapientiam tendere, neque ipsam esse sapientiam; quod mysterium ejus, barba tantum celebratur, & pallio.* Whereas the whole sentence runs thus: *Non est ergo sapientia, si ab hominum cœtu abhorret; quoniam, si sapientia homini data est, sine ullo discrimine, omnibus data est; ut nemo sit prorsus, qui eam capere non possit. At illi [Philosophi] virtutem humano generi datam sic amplexantur, ut soli omnium publico bono frui velle videantur; tam invidi, quam si velint deligare oculos, aut effodere cœteris, ne solem videant.—Quod si natura hominis sapientiæ capax est; oportuit opifices, & rusticos, & mulieres, et omnes denique qui humanam formam gerunt, doceri, sapiant; populumque ex omni lingua, & conditione, & sexu, & ætate conflari.* Then follows what the doctor quoted.

This has been a full answer to all the doctor had taken from him; if not to all the doctor has said on this head: and it plainly shews, this father here thought, that wisdom, as it was designed for all, was within the reach of all; and that which the lowest of mankind could not attain, was neither wisdom nor virtue; and that those philosophers, who would confine this universal light to themselves, were as envious, as if they would exclude others from the light of the sun. And that this alone was a sufficient proof, that their philosophy consisted only in the beard, and the cloak.

This father asserts nothing here, but what the wisest of men had long before owned, in saying, that wisdom is easily seen of them that love her; and found of such as seek her.——She goes about seeking such as are worthy

of her; ſhews herſelf favorable to them in the ways; and meeteth them in every thought. And,

What impartial man, who has compared the former, and preſent condition of mankind, can think the world much mended ſince the times of Tiberius; or though ever ſo well verſed in church hiſtory, can, from the conduct of Chriſtians find, that they are arrived to any higher ſtate of perfection, than the reſt of mankind; who are ſuppoſed to continue in their degeneracy, and corruption? What was the opinion of a late eminent philoſopher, as well as divine, is plain, by his ſaying, *Si reſurgerunt philoſophi & gentilium ſapientes, & perluſtrato orbe a nobis quærerent quid profuerit humano generi religio Chriſtiana, quoad mores et vitæ probitatem? quoad pacem et bonum publicum? nos utique appellatis barbaros per opprobrium: ſed nobis barbaris quid præſtatis vos Chriſtiani?*

Monſier Leibnitz, a great ſtateſmen as well as philoſopher, in comparing the Chriſtians at preſent, with the infidels of China, does not ſcruple to give the preference to the latter, in relation to all moral virtue;—and after having ſaid of them, *Dici enim non poteſt, quam pulchre omnia ad tranquillitatem publicam, ordinemque hominum inter ſe ut quam minimum ſibi ipſi incommodent, ſupra aliarum gentium leges apud ſinenſes ſint ordinata.* He adds, *Certe talis noſtrarum rerum mihi videtur eſſe conditio, gliſcentibus in immenſum corruptelis, ut propemodum neceſſarium, videatur miſſionarios ſinenſium ad nos mitti, qui theologiæ naturalis uſum, praxinque nos doceant quemadmodum nos illis mittimus qui theologiam eos doccant revelatam.* And the learned Huetius tells us, that "there is ſuch a conſtant agreement between the Chineſe themſelves, and their neighbors, that they ſeem to be all but one family."

Navarette, a Chineſe miſſionary, agrees with Leibnits, and ſays, that "It is the ſpecial providence of God, that the Chineſe did not know what is done in Chriſtendom; for if they did, there would be never a man among them, but would ſpit in our faces." And he adds, with reſpect to the manners of thoſe European Chriſtians, who

come into the Eaſt-Indies, and of the converts made by the miſſionaries; that "there are few converted in thoſe parts, where they converſe with the Europeans; and when it happens that any are converted, they prove ſo bad, it were better they had never been baptized." And I am afraid, it is much the ſame in relation to the Weſt-Indies. And.

Biſhop Kidder ſays of Chriſtians in general, that were a wiſe man to chooſe his religion by the lives of thoſe who profeſs it; perhaps Chriſtianity would be the laſt religion he would chooſe." And who, that has been abroad, and compared the lives of believers and unbelievers, does not ſay the ſame thing?

And Dr. Clark himſelf, in the diſcourſe we are now conſidering, has ſufficiently proved, that man is naturally a ſocial creature, full of benevolence, pity and tenderneſs; and he ſays, that "reaſon, which is the proper nature of man, can never lead men to any thing elſe than univerſal love and benevolence;" and that "wars, hatred and violence can never ariſe, but from extreme corruptions." Though there is no part of natural religion, but highly tends to improve this ſocial and benign temper; yet alas! we find, that what, in moſt places, paſſes for the Chriſtian religion, if not the chiefeſt part of it, has transformed this ſocial and benign creature into one fierce and cruel; and made him act with ſuch rage and fury againſt thoſe who never did, or deſigned him the leaſt injury, as could not have entered into the hearts of men to conceive, even though they were in the doctor's unavoidable ſtate of degeneracy and corruption.

If people are once perſuaded, that what their prieſts call ſchiſm, hereſy, infidelity, &c. though held with the utmoſt ſincerity, are damnable ſins; it wants not much ſkill to perſuade them to hate thoſe morally, whom God, they are already perſuaded, will hate to all eternity; and that, as they regard the preſervation of the orthodox faith, and the ſaving their own ſouls, and the ſouls of all that are dear to them, they ought to take the moſt ef

fectual methods to root out all ſuch damnable opinions. It is upon this common principle, that the inquiſition is eſtabliſhed; and the papiſts, to do them juſtice, act up to it; though perhaps, even among them, there are ſome lay-men, where nature is too hard for principles.

If once pernicious opinions are believed to be contained in any revelation, they will have the ſame effect, as if really there. Has not the belief of the judicial power of the clergy, as to the next world; and their independent power in this world, done the ſame miſchief, as if they had been really contained in ſcripture? And if they, who maintain theſe, and other as vile maxims, have got poſſeſſion of the minds of men, by ingroſſing (not to mention other arts) the teaching the young, as well as inſtructing the old; what leſs than a new revelation can expoſe their expoſitions, or explain away their explanations of the preſent revelation, which have proved more fatal to the happine.s of mankind, than all the ſuperſtitions of the pagan world. Had the bees ſpeech and reaſon, would they, think you, from age to age, have continued to give the beſt part of their honey to ſuch haranguing drones, who, for the moſt part, employed their talents, to ſet not only hive againſt hive; but the bees of the ſame hive againſt one another, for ſuch things as had no other tendency, than to make the idle drones lord it over the induſtrious bees? But not to deviate,

We have no great reaſon to hope, it will ever be ſo with mankind; but that there will always be too much room for ſuch arguments, as the doctor urges from the corruption of mankind, for new revelations. Have not impoſtors always made uſe of this plea? Was it not on the carnality of the primitive orthodox chriſtians, that the ſpiritual Montanus founded his new goſpel; which divided the chriſtian world for no ſmall time, and made the celebrated Tertullian ſay; that "the law and prophets were to be looked on as the infancy; and the goſpel, as it were, the youth; but that there was no

complete perfection to be found, but in the inſtruction of the holy ghoſt, who ſpoke by Montanus."

And it was the ill lives of the profeſſors of Chriſtianity, as it is owned by Chriſtian as well as Arabic writers, which prepared the way for that ſucceſs which Mahomet met with; whoſe religion, as it gained in a ſhort time more proſelytes than any other, ſo it is ſtill gaining ground: for which father Marracci, who has ſo well tranſlated, and makes ſuch juſt reflections on the alchoran, gives this odd reaſon: *Habet nimirum hæc ſuperſtitio* (Mahumedana) *quicquid plauſibile, ac probabile in Chriſtiana religione reperitur, et quæ Naturæ legi ac lumini conſentanea videntur. Myſteria illa fidei noſtræ, quæ primo aſpectu, incredibilia, et impoſſibilia, apparent; et præipue, quæ nimis ardua humanæ naturæ cenſentur, penitus excludit. Hinc moderni idolorum cultores, facilius ac promptius Saracenicam, quam Evangelicam legem amplectuntur.* But,

The doctor is ſo far from ſolving the difficulties attending this ſcheme, that he quits it, and artfully introduces a new ſcene; and though he had before laid it down as a moſt evident truth, that God does nothing by mere will and arbitrarineſs; yet this new hypotheſis is wholly built on it, in ſuppoſing that in theſe latter times, God intended to give ſome men, without regard to their merits, an higher degree of happineſs than he did the reſt; and to ſhew how conſiſtent this is with reaſon, he ſays, "as God was not obliged to make all his creatures equal, or to make men angels, or to endow all men with the ſame capacities and faculties; ſo he was not bound to make all men capable of the ſame degree, or the ſame kind of happineſs, or to afford all men the very ſame means and opportunity of obtaining it."

B. But how comes this to be ſhifting the ſcene, and introducing a new hypotheſis?

A. Becauſe his former ſuppoſes men living and dying in a depraved, corrupted, degenerate, and impious ſtate, incapable of reformation, whereas in this all men are allowed to have, in general, the means of attaining to a

certain degree of happineſs hereafter; whilſt Chriſtians alone have in particular the means and opportunities of gaining his higher degree, and kind of happineſs.

Though infinite variety of creatures, and conſequently inequality, is neceſſary to ſhew the great extent of the divine goodneſs, which plainly appears from the beautiful and well-formed ſyſtem of the world, and the due ſubordination of things, all contrived for the happineſs of the whole; yet ſure, it does not from thence follow, that God will not, either here or hereafter, beſtow on the rational creation, all the happineſs their nature is capable of; ſince that was the end why God gave it them.

Can God, who equally beholds all the dwellers on earth, free from partiality and prejudice, make ſome people his favorites, without any conſideration of their merits; and merely becauſe they believe certain opinions taught in that country where they happen to be born; while others, far the greater number, ſhall, from age to age, want his favor; not upon the account of their demerits, but becauſe deſtined to live in places where God, who always acts from motives of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, thought it beſt to conceal from them all ſuch opinions? What can more repreſent God as an arbitrary and partial being, than thus to ſuppoſe, that he vouchſafes not to afford, the greateſt part of mankind, the happineſs, of which himſelf had made them capable?

Muſt not every one perceive, that this narrow notion is inconſiſtent with the character of a being of unlimited benevolence? Is not infinite goodneſs always the ſame? How then can it, in theſe laſt days, make ſuch inequality among men? Is not this ſuppoſing inconſtancy in the divine conduct? Is not this notion repugnant to the natural idea we have of the divine goodneſs? As likewiſe to thoſe expreſs texts of ſcripture, which declare God is no reſpecter of perſons; that every one, of what nation ſoever, ſhall be rewarded according to his works? And that men are accepted according to what they have, and not according to what they have not?

If God, as the doctor contends, will judge men as they are accountable, that is, as they are rational; muſt not the judgment of the moſt righteous judge, hold an exact proportion to the uſe they have made of their reaſon? And if the ſtate of men in this life be a ſtate of probation, and for that cauſe they are made moral agents, capable of knowing good from evil, and conſequently, of doing every thing that is fit to be done; muſt they not be dealt with hereafter, according to the uſe they have made of their moral agency?

How can men be ſure, if God acts thus partially, that this partiality may not even now be in favor of other countries, than thoſe they live in; and of other notions, which not flowing from the nature and reaſon of things, we may be wholly unacquainted with? If men may loſe any part of the favor of God for impoſſibilities; or not obſerving ſuch rules as he never gave them; where ſhall we ſtop? Could I think God ſo partial and prejudiced, as moſt ſects, for their own ſakes, repreſent him; how could I admire, love, and adore him, as I ought? Nay, how can any, who have ſuch unworthy notions of God, be certain, the prejudice and partiality of God will be in their favor? If you admit any one imperfection in God; how can you be ſure of his veracity, immutability, or any other perfection whatever?

Though Dr. Clark contends for what terminates in this groſs partiality, as if the whole of chriſtianity was founded on it; yet ſome of our divines, of the firſt rank too, are of a different opinion; from two of which, I will give you the following quotations.

"God's goodneſs and mercy" (ſays Mr. Whorton) "were, from all ages, equal and uniform; his juſtice always impartial and univerſal, in excluding none from his favor, but for reaſons common to them with all mankind.———The univerſality, and impartiality of the divine juſtice and favor, is founded on the excellency of the divine nature; which cannot be ſuppoſed to want that, which above all is neceſſary for the government of the world; impartial juſtice in the diſpencing of rewards

and punishments.——All men are equally created by God; and if we respect that alone, all have an equal title to his favor.——Otherwise we could not but conceive injustice in God; nor were it possible to reconcile such a partiality with his infinite excellency. The reason why God is no respecter of persons, is said to be, because there is no iniquity with the Lord.* All reasonable preference of one person to another, must be founded on some just cause; otherwise it would be trifling, and fond; nay, even unjust and foolish.——Far be it from us, to imagine any such imperfections in God; in him there is no variableness, or shadow of change.——He ever proceeds upon fixed, and immoveable principles; which equally serve for all actions and causes.——God has fixed most impartial laws of government; which universally affect all the members of mankind.—It is so pleasing a delusion, to fancy themselves dear to God in an extraordinary manner, and for unaccountable reasons; that it is no wonder many have been tempted to entertain such a charming error.—— This seduced the Jews.—This prejudice has corrupted great numbers of christians.—Is God the God of the Jews and Christians only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Are not his attributes always unalterable; and the influence of these equally derived down to all his creatures?"

That celebrated preacher, Dr. Ibbott, affirms, that "It is not our being of any nation, or any sect, members of any particular church, or society; that will intitle us to the favor of God; but our working the work of God, living up to that light and knowledge which he has afforded us; and being most punctual, and exact in the discharge of those moral duties, which all mankind, who have any true notions of God and religion, have ever thought themselves obliged to."—— Again, "Wherever men fear God, and love one another, they will be accepted without any regard to their country, or nation; their tribe, or family; for this is what God would bring all people to, from the rising of

* 2 Chron. xxiii. 49.

the ſun unto the going down thereof. This is that inward temper of mind, and that outward practice of life, which he requires; and which, wherever he meets it, will find acceptance with him."

The contrary is a notion, which lays a foundation for everlaſting perſecution; for if men flatter themſelves, that they, upon the account of their particular ſyſtems, are the favorites of Heaven; and that others ſhall want, even to eternity, many degrees of their happineſs; will not that oblige them, as they love their children, families, friends, neighbors and relations; to uſe any means, come into any perſecuting meaſures, to prevent ſuch opinions from ſpreading, as they imagine, would deprive them of that degree of happineſs, which otherwiſe they might ever enjoy: And is it not chiefly owing to this abſurdity, that even the moſt moderate of the different ſects, are far from treating one another with that benevolence, which the common ties of humanity require?

Did men believe, that all, who were equally ſincere, were equally acceptable to God; there could be no pretence for the leaſt partiality, much leſs for perſecution, either poſitive, or negative: Nor could any man love another the leſs, for the wideſt difference in opinions: And then of courſe, men's indignation would be wholly bent againſt immorality, diſcoverable by the light of nature; which, now, alas! is but too often protected by zeal for mere ſpeculations.

This principle, and this alone, would cauſe univerſal love, and benevolence among the whole race of mankind; and did it prevail, muſt ſoon produce a new, and glorious face of things; or, in the ſcripture-phraſe, a new Heaven, and a new Earth; and would free men from that miſerable perplexity, in which the fear of miſtaking in ſpeculative matters involves them.

What aſſurance, upon any other ground, can even the generality of chriſtians have, that they do not err moſt dangerouſly; when they conſider what diviſions there have been, from the beginning, among chriſtians about

ſuch points? And that the guides or their own churches, even the moſt able, though they agree in ſaying, their fundamentals are plain; have not always the ſame ſet of fundamentals; and when they have, widely differ in explaining them: Can they, I ſay, who conſider this, be certain, that it is not the fear of the loſs of preferment, or ſome other political reaſons, that keep up any ſort of verbal agreement among them, even in things owned to be of the higheſt conſequence; and which, as ſuch, are placed in their creeds and articles? Conſider with yourſelf, what comfort, what ſatisfaction, it muſt give a man, eſpecially on his death-bed, to be certain, he is not accountable for any errors in opinion; if he has, according as his circumſtances permit, done his beſt to diſcover the will of God?

Dr. Prideaux ſays, "The main arguments Mahomet made uſe of, to delude men into the impoſture, were his promiſes, and his threats; being thoſe which eaſily work on the affections of the vulgar." If the bulk of mankind are ſo eaſily deluded by threats and promiſes, when joined to opinions as abſurd as thoſe of Mahomet; can there be any other way to avoid their being deluded in proportion to the greatneſs of thoſe promiſes and threats; but by annexing them, not to any ſet of opinions, but to ſincerity and inſincerity? For here, the only effect they can have, is to make men judge without prejudice and partiality.

The preſent biſhop of Sarum ſays, "God is juſt, equal, and good; and as ſure as he is ſo, he cannot put the ſalvation and happineſs of any man, upon what he has not put it in the power of any man on earth to be intirely ſatisfied of." And much leſs, ſay I, can a juſt, equal, and good God put the ſalvation, or any part of the happineſs of the greateſt part of mankind, upon that, of which, inſtead of being entirely ſatisfied, they are intirely ignorant. Is it poſſible, a miſtaken chriſtian can have a title to the favor of God, and a man of another religion not have the ſame title; when that ſincerity, on which the title depends,

is common to both? "If the favor of God," as the biſhop ſays, "follows ſincerity, as ſuch; and equally follows every degree of ſincerity;" muſt not men of all religions whatever, if equally ſincere, have the ſame title to be equally favored with God? who is the only infallible judge of their ſincerity, in the uſe of thoſe talents, whether great, or ſmall, he has endowed them with. And,

Mr. Chillingworth was ſo far from thinking involuntary errors, crimes; that he thought it criminal to aſk pardon for them: and ſays, "That would be to impute to God the ſtrange tyranny of requiring bricks, where he has given no ſtraw; of expecting to gather, where he has not ſtrowed; to reap, where he ſowed not; of being offended with us for not doing, what he knew we could not do." And,

The Romaniſts themſelves, though they own the common people can have but an imperfect knowledge of what their infallible church requires; yet ſay, that "a diſpoſition to receive, and an endeavor to underſtand what it teaches, is ſufficient." And ſhall not the proteſtants allow as much to ſuch a diſpoſition, in relation to the will of God; as the papiſts do, to the will of man? But ſince there are ſome, to whom theſe notions about ſincerity, will appear ſhocking; for their ſakes, I will quote a divine, whom they have in a manner idolized: I mean the famous Mr. Leſley. who ſays, "In the beginning God created man, and left him in the hands of his own counſel (Eccleſ. xv. 14.) He ſet life and death, bleſſing and curſing for him to chuſe; and God will bleſs, or curſe him, according to what he has ſet before him; whether by revelation, or his own natural reaſon only: And who is judge of this but God, who always knows the ſincerity of the intentions of any man, and what endeavors he has uſed towards the right informing his judgment?"

In a word, this is ſo evident a truth, that there are none, but who, with the biſhop of London, ſay, "Chriſtianity requires no further favor, than a fair and

impartial inquiry into the grounds and doctrines of it;" even while they are designing the further favors of fines, pillories, and imprisonment, &c. But to return to the doctor.

I would be glad to know, whether the greater degree of happiness, from which Dr. Clark would exclude the rest of mankind; belongs to all those innumerable sects, that go under the name of christians; or to one sect, by virtue of its peculiar fundamentals; or else to all christians, who, though ever so much mistaken, sincerely endeavor to find out the will of God? If the doctor says the latter, he cannot think this favor depends on any set of notions, but on sincerity; and consequently, must equally belong to all that are equally sincere: But allowing that christians are to be rewarded above others, equally sincere; yet if they are likewise subject to be punished above others for their mistakes, even about such abstruse notions, as divide the most eminent men of the same most eminent church; such as Dr. Waterland, and Dr. Clark; nay, Dr. Clark, in some editions of his book, and himself in other editions; where then, is the great advantage of the doctor's hypothesis? But,

If christians are to be punished hereafter, for not observing such things, as the happiness of mankind in general does not depend on; God, certainly, is far from being partial in their favor; if not, where is the difference?

B. But does not the doctor raise an argument, from men's different capacities and abilities in this life, for their having different degrees of happiness hereafter?

A. Though men here have different capacities, yet if that depends on bodily organs; all souls may in Heaven have equal capacities: But even this supposition will not serve his purpose, except the wisest of the philosophers had not abilities equal to the meanest christian; and so (allowing a proportion between happiness and abilities) were naturally incapable of the same degree, or kind of happiness. But,

The doctor himself seems conscious of the weakness, even of this new hypothesis; since he, after he had used it, to get rid of a troublesome objection; strait quits it in saying, "That as no man ever denied, but that the benefit of Christ's death extended backward, to those who lived before his appearance in the world; so no one can prove, but the same benefit may extend itself forward to those, who never heard of his appearance; though they lived after it. If both these, though knowing nothing of Christ, or his death, reap the benefit of his death; what more can the most perfect believer expect? So that even on this supposition, the doctor must have owned, that all men, living up to that light God has given them, are upon a level, in relation to their future happiness.

And indeed, if sinners, since the coming of Christ are not to be saved without repentance and amendment; and sinners, at all times, were to be saved on these terms, or else could not be saved at all; must not repentance and amendment, which suppose a knowledge of what was to be repented of, and amended; put all mankind, at all times, upon a level, with relation to their future happiness? Can any thing be more evident, than that, if doing evil is the only foundation of the displeasure of God; ceasing to do evil, and doing the contrary, must take away that displeasure? As long as men continue in their sins, they must continue the proper objects of the resentment of God; but when they, forsaking their sins, act a part suitable to their rational nature, they of course become the proper objects of his approbation: And this, sure, cannot be denied, except you suppose, Christ, who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; proposed some other way of reconciling them to God, than by persuading them to bring forth fruits meet for repentance or, in other words, by obliging them to live up to the eternal, and universal law of righteousness.

Though the doctor says no more than our articles affirm, viz. that "the obligation of Christ once made, is

that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, both original, and actual;" yet I wish the doctor had been more explicit, and told us, what benefit those who never heard of Christ's appearance, could gain by his death.

B. The doctor says, that "Christ died, to shew the irreconcilable hatred of God to sin; and to vindicate the honor of his laws."

A. These reasons, sure, could never influence those, who never heard of Christ; or, if they had, perhaps, would have been so rpeverse, as not to imagine, that pardoning the guilty, and punishing the innocent, could either shew irreconcilable enmity to guilt, or love for innocence; and perhaps, governed by prejudices, might think very oddly of a king, who, though he freely pardoned his repenting rebels; yet should cause his most loyal, and only son to be put to death, to shew his hatred to rebellion; and to vindicate the honor of those laws, which forbid putting an innocent person to death; or any person to be any way instrumental to his own death; much more to sacrifice himself. Could these philosophers, who did not imagine any virtue in sacrificing of beasts, to wash away the sins of men; easily conceive a human sacrifice, which they believed human nature abhorred, to be an expiation for sins? Or, that sins freely pardoned, could want no expiation? Or, that all was mere mercy, and pure forgiveness, after a full equivalent paid, and adequate satisfaction given?

B. This, indeed, seems to me as great a mystery, as that the same God should receive satisfaction from, and give satisfaction to the same God: and that the same God, who thus receives, and gives satisfaction, should neither give, or receive any satisfaction; since the holy ghost, the same God with God the father, and God the son, neither gives, or receives any satisfaction.

A. Though I have omitted several things, which well deserve to be criticised; yet, I think, I have said enough to shew the inconsistency of the doctor's scheme; and the weakness of all those arguments, by which he at-

tempts to deſtroy the all-ſufficiency, abſolute perfection, plainneſs, and perſpicuity of the law of nature; which he had before ſo fully demonſtrated. Who could expect, after we had been told, that as God governs all his own actions by the eternal rule of reaſon; ſo all his rational creatures are obliged to govern themſelves in all theirs, by the ſame eternal rule: A rule too, owned to be ſo plain, that the reaſon of all men every where naturally, and neceſſarily aſſents to it: Who, I ſay, after theſe, and a number of other ſuch expreſſions, could imagine, that all this ſhould be unſaid, and the utmoſt art employed, to ſhew the imperfection, inſufficiency, obſcurity, and uncertainty of the light of nature; and that by reaſon of its many defects, all mankind from age to age, were in an [illegible] ſtate of corruption? And that, even thoſe few men, who made it their buſineſs to ſtudy natural religion, were intirely ignorant of ſome doctrines, abſolutely neceſſary for the reformation of mankind? Nay, that they were (here the doctor, perhaps, deſcribes his own conduct) "like men wandering in the wide ſea, without knowing whither to go, or which way to take; or having any guide to conduct them?" And, in ſupport of his hypotheſis, make no ſcruple to repreſent God, not alike good at all times and places; and to have acted for many ages with ſo little foreſight; as to give mankind no other light for their conduct, than ſuch as diſabled them from anſwering that end, for which it was given: And afterward, with ſo little goodneſs; as when he ſaw this defect, ſtill to continue the greateſt part of mankind in that diſmal ſtate of darkneſs, in which all before were involved? And then, after he had made the moſt of this ſtrange hypotheſis, to quit it for the ſake of another, no leſs ſtrange? And, though he had declared, that God does nothing in the government of the world, out of mere will and arbitrarineſs; yet to ſuppoſe, that God acts thus with his rational creatures; and without regard to merit, arbitrarily deſigns Chriſtians a greater degree of happineſs than others? And at laſt quit too, even this hypotheſis; by

ſuppoſing all men, though they never heard of Chriſt's death, to be upon a level, in relation to any benefits received from it? And, I may add,

When men conſider, how often this diſcourſe has been reprinted, and reviewed by a man owned to be as great a maſter of reaſon, as ever appeared in print; and withal, both a ſubtle metaphyſician, and excellent mathematician; and acute philoſopher, as well as a deep divine; one, who never fails to exhauſt the ſubject he handles: When men, I ſay, conſider all this, will they not be apt to cry?

Si pergama dextra, &c.

B. I muſt own, you have produced ſeveral weighty arguments, many of them new, at leaſt, to me; to prove that religion was, and always muſt be invariably the ſame; but ſince you go out of the common road, and the path you take, is ſcarce at all trodden; you muſt expect, it will be ſaid of you, as of ſome modern writers, that you are better at pulling down, than building up.

A. When any notion, in defence of which people have little to ſay, is attacked, they uſually cry, Why will you pull down, except you build up? When in reality, error muſt be removed, in order to make way for truth: You muſt pull down one, before you can build up the other. But here, I hope, there is no room for that objection; becauſe, as nothing but rubbiſh is removed, nothing but what is either conſiſtent with, or, at leaſt, takes off from, the full exerciſe of piety, and virtue; ſo every thing is advanced, which tends to promote the honor of God, and the happineſs of human ſocieties. And, I may add, that as in attacking the ſuperſtition of any one party, all the reſt would think me in the right; ſo here all parties, without coming into the hypotheſis of their adverſaries, may, by equally receding from theſe arbitrary things they have brought into religion, come to an happy agreement.

For my part, I think, there is none who wish well to mankind, but must likewise wish this hypothesis to be true; and can there be a greater proof of its truth, than that it is, in all its parts, so exactly calculated for the good of mankind, that either to add to, or take from it, will be to their manifest prejudice? And,

If, as bishop Chandler remarks, "They are deceivers, and true enemies to mankind, who do not teach a religion most worthy of God, most friendly to society, most helpful to government, and most beneficial to every individual," what need we run to his Jewish rabbies, or any other rabbies, to discover this true religion? If it is by this test, that our reason must judge of the truth of all religion; are not they the best friends to mankind, who teach such a religion, without the least mixture of those arbitrary things, that have caused such fatal contentions among christians? And which, at the best, serve only to divert them from attending to a religion most worthy of God, most friendly to society, most helpful to government, and most beneficial to every individual; and withal, is a religion, as I hope is here fully proved, founded upon such demonstrable principles, as are obvious to the meanest capacity; and most effectually prevents the growth, both of scepticism and enthusiasm.

I entirely agree with this right reverend father, that "Christianity in itself, stripped of the additions that policy, mistake, and the circumstances of time, have made to it, is a most holy religion;" but I may add, that by reason of these additions, it is become, in most places, a most unholy religion. And can we hope to get rid of these additions, but by bringing them to the bishop's own test? I might here ask him, Who are they, that have brought in, and still defend these additions to christianity; which, as all fair, and candid writers own, have given great advantages to its adversaries?

What good christian is not ready to join with the excellent Dr. Sykes, in wishing, "That christians would not vend under the name of evangelical truths, the ab

ſurd, and contradictory ſchemes of ignorant, or wicked men? That they would part with the load of rubbiſh, which makes thinking men ſink under the weight, and gives too great a handle to infidelity?" "The hands of friends to chriſtianity," he ſays, "have been much embarraſſed, through fear of ſpeaking againſt local truths; and its adverſaries have ſo ſucceſsfully attacked thoſe weakneſſes, that chriſtianity itſelf has been deemed indefenſible; when, in reality, the follies of chriſtians alone have been ſo." If this be true, have I not ſhewn ſome reſolution, in daring to attack the darling weakneſſes, and follies of falſe chriſtians; in proving that true chriſtianity is ſo far from being indefenſible, that it carries its own evidences with it; or in other words, all its doctrines plainly ſpeak themſelves to be the will of an infinitely wiſe, and good God; as being moſt friendly to ſociety, moſt helpful to government, and moſt beneficial to every individual; or, in one word, free from all prieſt-craft.

B. There is one objection which will always ſtick, you will be repreſented as an affecter of novelty; and that it is pride and vain-glory, which makes you go out of the common road.

A. That is a reflection all muſt expect, who endeavor to reform any prevailing abuſes: They little underſtand human nature, who do not ſee, that novelty, in this caſe, can only ſerve to make a man deſpiſed by the majority, for his ignorance; in not being able to diſcover that truth, which they, at firſt ſight, clearly perceive; as well as hated by them, for propagating falſe doctrines; and inhumanly treated for it, if it claſhes (and where does not reformation claſh) with the intereſt of a certain ſet of men, who have two thirds of mankind, viz. the bigots and immoral, intirely at their devotions. But,

I am ſo far from being a noveliſt, that all, except where they diſagree with themſelves, muſt agree with me: Are not all of my ſentiments, who own, that their religion contains all things worthy of having God for its

author: For that ſuppoſes, that reaſon, antecedently to revelation, can tell them what is, or is not worthy of having God for its author: And do not all recede from revelation, or, which is the ſame, recede from the plain, obvious, grammatical conſtruction of its words, whenever that, in the leaſt point, recedes from the religion of nature and reaſon? Which being, as Dr. Prideaux owns, wrote in the hearts of every one of us from the creation; is "the touchſtone of all religion;" and that, "if the goſpel varies from it in any particular, or in the minuteſt circumſtances is contrary to its righteouſneſs; that is ſtrong enough to deſtroy the whole cauſe; and make all things elſe that can be ſaid for its ſupport, totally ineffectual." Which ſuppoſes, we cannot judge of the truth of any revelation, till we apply to it the touchſtone of all religion; and ſee whether it agrees with that in all particulars. And do not all, without regard to the plain meaning of the words, in interpreting the precepts of the goſpel, (which are, for the moſt part, delivered in general, undetermined, and very often, hyperbolical terms;) ſo explain, limit, and reſtrain theſe precepts, as to make them agreeable to the touchſtone of all religion, the nature and reaſon of things; for fear, that otherwiſe they might depreciate morality: And in this caſe, they, as it is allowed, are the beſt interpreters, who moſt recede from the killing letter. And is not this, in effect, ſaying with the preſent biſhop of Bangor, "That the goſpel is a republication of the law of nature; and its precepts declarative of that original religion, which was as old as the creation. And, "It would be as reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that three angles of a triangle ſhould be equal to two right ones in one age, and unequal in another; as to ſuppoſe, that the duties of religion ſhould differ in one age, from what they were in another; the habitudes, and relations from which they flow, continuing always the ſame.

The principles I maintain are ſo evident, that they who are introducing things in oppoſition to them, muſt

yet own their force. Dare any ſay, that God is an arbitrary being, and his laws not founded on the eternal reaſon of things; even while they are contending for his acting arbitrarily, and giving ſuch laws as are founded on mere will and pleaſure? Will any maintain, that our reaſoning faculties were not given us, to diſtinguiſh between good and evil, religion and ſuperſtition? Or that they will not anſwer the end for which they were given?

Will any affirm, that the nature of God is not eternally the ſame? Or that the nature of man is changed? Or that the relations God and man ſtand in to one another, are not always the ſame; nay, even while they are making alterations in theſe relations, by ſuppoſing new laws, and new duties?

If all own, that God, at no time, could have any motives to give laws to mankind, but for their good; and that he is, at all times, equally good, and, at all times, acts upon the ſame motives; muſt they not own with me, except they are inconſiſtent with themſelves, that his laws, at all times muſt be the ſame? And that the good of mankind is the teſt, the criterion, or the internal evidence, by which we are to judge of all his laws? But,

If, after all, I am ſtill criminal, it muſt be in not owning, that God created the greateſt part of mankind to be damned; or, which is the ſame, made ſuch things neceſſary to their ſalvation, as they were incapable of knowing? And in my aſſerting, that God is a rewarder of ſuch as diligently ſeek him;* though they do not ſeek him under the direction of this, or that ſet of men; who, provided they can make themſelves neceſſary here, care not who they damn hereafter. And thus,

In believing with St. Peter, that God is no reſpecter of perſons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him:† And with St Paul, that the Gentiles do by nature the things con-

* Heb. xi. 6. † Acts x. 34. 35.

tained in the law: And that God will render to every man (whether believer, or unbeliever,) according to his deeds:* And that the grace of God, which bringeth salvation,------teaching us,------we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, (which takes in the whole of our duty) has appeared to all men,† and at all times. And,

In believing with our saviour, that the whole need not of a physician ;‡ and that the doctine he taught shews itself to be the will of God; and that he did not speak of himself;§ and in believing the description that God himself gives of the new covenant; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts:—They shall not teach every man his neighbor.—They shall all know me from the least to the greatest.‖

In a word, all are forced to own these sentiments I contend for, except the Authropomorphites; they, indeed, said, that fallible reason must give place to infallible revelation; or in Dr. Waterland's words, that "to advance natural light, that is, pagan darkness, in opposition to scripture evidence, is setting up human conjectures above divine truths:" And that, since the scripture so frequently imputes human parts, and passions to God, we ought not to doubt of it; only because we cannot reconcile it with that philosophy, with which the bulk of mankind, for whom the scripture was chiefly wrote, are entirely ignorant of.

In our next conference (it being high time to put an end to this) I shall shew you that all mankind, Jews, Gentiles, Mahometans, &c. agree, in owning the sufficiency of the law of nature, to make men acceptable to God; and that the primitive Christians believed, there was an exact agreement between natural and revealed religion; and that the excellency of the latter, did consist in being a republication of the former.

* Rom. ii. 14. 6. † Tit. ii. 11, 12. ‡ Mat. ix. 12
§ John vii. 17. ‖ Heb. viii. 10, 11.

For the preſent take theſe few authorities: "If," ſays the renowned Origen, "we admit the judgment of God to be juſt, we muſt acknowledge, that there can be no ground for the puniſhment of ſinners, unleſs the common conceptions of all men, are ſufficient to give them a ſound underſtanding in the duties of morality. And therefore, it is not to be thought ſtrange, that thoſe things that God has taught us by the prophets, and by our ſaviour, were implanted by him in the minds of men; that ſo every man, having had the intention, andmeaning of the law written in his own heart, ſhould be left without excuſe before the divine tribunal." And,

Lactantius, the moſt eloquent of the fathers ſeems raviſhed with the deſcription Cicero gives of the law of nature: and therefore, chooſes to expreſs his own ſenſe of it, in the words of that philoſopher. "The law of God," ſays he, "is neceſſary to be obſerved, that will lead us into the way of happineſs; that holy and heavenly law, I mean, which Marcus Tullius has, as it were, divinely deſcribed in his third book *de Republica;* and whoſe words, I will, therefore, ſubjoin. Right reaſon is a law of truth, conſonant to nature, implanted in all men, uniform and eternal.—This law neither needs to be propoſed, nor can it ever be, either in whole, or part, repealed; neither ſenate, nor people, can diſcharge us from the obligation of it; we need not look abroad for an expoſitor to make us underſtand it. It is not one law at Rome, another at Athens; one at this time, another hereafter; but one and the ſame immutable law continues, and extends itſelf to all times and nations; and one God is the common Lord and governor of all things. He it is, that has framed, propounded, and eſtabliſhed this law; and whoſoever obeys not him, abandons even himſelf, renounces his own nature; and in ſo doing, ſuffers actually in himſelf the greateſt puniſhment, though he eſcapes all things elſe which are deemed ſo."

St. Auſtin ſays, the reaſon why God has given us a

written law, is not becauſe his law was not already written in our hearts; but becauſe men letting out their appetites after things abroad, became ſtrangers to themſelves; and therefore, we have been ſummoned, and called upon by him, who is every where preſent, to return into ourſelves: For what is that the outward written law calls for, unto thoſe who have forſaken the law written in their hearts; but return, O ye tranſgreſſors, to your own hearts?"*

I ſhall, likewiſe, ſhew you, that the law of liberty, that perfect law of liberty, which we are obliged to maintain in all our words and actions, as the law we are to be judged by;† does not conſiſt in a freedom from things of a moral nature, for that would be perfect ſlavery; but from all thoſe things as are not of ſuch a nature: And that it is evident from the reaſoning, which runs through all the epiſtles, that the placing religion in any indifferent thing, is inconſiſtent with the nature of chriſtianity; it is introducing Judaiſm, or what (as chriſtians have found to their coſt) is ſtill more prejudicial.

And therefore, inſtead of tranſcribing the beſt part of the epiſtles, I ſhall only mention a text, or two: The apoſtle of the Gentiles not only ſays, Stand faſt in the liberty, wherewith Chriſt hath made you free; but declares, Wherever the ſpirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and conſequently, that they who impoſe any indifferent things, as part of religion, ſin againſt our chriſtian liberty; and act by another ſpirit than that of the Lord: And I am afraid, that in this, as well as in many other caſes, the ſpirit of the Lord, and the ſpirit of the church, in moſt places, have been very oppoſite. And leſt we ſhould miſtake in this important point, the apoſtle likewiſe tells us, not only in what things the kingdom of God does, but in what things it does not conſiſt; The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteouſneſs, peace, and joy in the holy ghoſt; for

* Iſaiah xlvi. 8. † James i. 25. ii. 12.

he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of man: Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith we may edify one another.* If these are the only things, by which we can serve Christ, and which will make us acceptable to God, and approved of men; can such things, as have no tendency to promote righteousness, peace, and joy in the holy ghost, make us serviceable to Christ, or acceptable either to God, or man?

These words of the apostle, though they need no paraphrase, yet I shall mention what Calvin says on this place; *Nam fieri non potest, ubi quispiam Deo acceptus est ac hominibus probatus, quin perfecte in ipso vigeat ac floreat regnum Dei. Qui tranquilla placidaq; conscientia per justitiam servit Christo, tam hominibus quam Deo se approbat. Ubi ergo est justitia, & pax, & guadium spirituale, illic regnum Dei suis omnibus numeris est absolutum.* And with Mr. Musculus, and others of our first reformers, agree. And if the kingdom of God, which has these things, is absolutely perfect, *omnibus suis numeris absolutum;* it can only be the kingdom of satan, which requires things of a different nature: And if it is in these things only we can serve Christ, others cannot be introduced, but for the service of antichrist.

However, I shall, at present, content myself with saying, There are but two ways for any thing to oblige; either from the reason of the thing, or else from a positive command: Now, if there are no such things, as are commanded to be observed at all times, and by all people; and no commands can oblige those, to whom they were not given; we have no way left, to know what things oblige perpetually, but from their nature; which will, sufficiently distinguish them from those, which (in so miscellaneous a book as the bible, taking in such a vast period of time) might be given upon certain occasions, and particular reason; in which we are no ways concerned, than like them, to act according as the cir-

* Rom. xiv. 17, 18, 19.

cumſtances we are in require. Without this, chriſtians would have no certain rule, to know what precepts oblige perpetually; all being alike commanded in ſcripture, without making any difference; no precepts being ſaid to bind all mankind, or to bind any for ever, except thoſe relating to the Jewiſh œconomy; which in an hundred places, we are told, are to laſt for ever.

To comprize the matter in few words, what I have been endeavoring to prove, is,

Firſt, That there are things, which, by their internal excellency, ſhew themſelves to be the will of an infinite wiſe, and good God.

Secondly, There are things which have no worth in themſelves; yet becauſe thoſe that have, cannot many times be performed without them, theſe are to be conſidered as means to an end; and being of a mutable nature, are left to human diſcretion, to be varied as beſt ſuits thoſe ends; for the ſake of which only they are inſtituted.

Thirdly, That there are ſome things ſo indifferent, as not to be conſidered either as means, or ends; and to place any part of religion in the obſervation of theſe, is highly ſuperſtitious. And I may venture to ſay, He that carries theſe diſtinctions in his mind, will have a truer notion of religion, than if he had read all the ſchoolmen, fathers, and councils.

B. I own, it is time to give you ſome reſpite, and to thank you for the favor, which cannot be too much acknowledged; in thus freely communicating your tho'ts on this important ſubject; and doing it after ſuch a manner, as cannot, were this conference to be publiſhed, offend perſons, though of the greateſt gravity, who have the intereſt of turth at heart.

A. Before we part, I muſt remind you of the occaſion of this conference; for though you plainly ſaw, that God never intended mankind ſhould be without religion; or could ordain an imperfect religion; and there-

fore, did not ſee how to avoid concluding, there muſt have been from the beginning, a religion moſt perfect which mankind, at all times, were capable of knowing; yet you were at a loſs, how to make out chriſtianity to be this perfect, this original religion: How far I have gone in removing this difficulty, you beſt know. All I can ſay, is, I am willing, whenever you pleaſe, to reſume the conference; and begging leave to repeat what I have mentioned at firſt, am ready to give up my hypotheſis, if you can name one attended with few difficulties; and likewiſe, to aſſure you, that if I have advanced any notion, which does not naturally, and neceſſarily ſhew itſelf to be the will of God; by tending to promote his honor, and the good of man; I here intirely renounce it: And by not perſiſting to defend error, give this uncommon mark of an ingenius diſpoſition. *Errare poſſum, Hæreticus eſſe malo.*

F I N I S.